

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES APPLIED TO
THE GOLIAD CAMPAIGN OF 1836

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by

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES APPLIED TO THE GOLIAD CAMPAIGN OF 1836, by
MAJ Michael J. Talley, 96 pages.

The Goliad Campaign of 1836 is regarded as an obscure debacle in the annals of the Texas War for Independence, especially when compared to the famous and romanticized Battle of the Alamo. Goliad, arguably, had greater strategic importance, was better fortified, and was far more defensible than the Alamo; yet the leaders of both campaigns are regarded as complete opposites. The likes of Travis, Bowie, and Crockett are enshrined as heroic icons to most Americans, while Colonel James Walker Fannin Jr., Commanding Officer of Goliad, left an infamous legacy of recklessness, and indecisiveness, and is still considered largely responsible for the worst massacre in Texas history. During the Goliad Campaign of 1836, Fannin made several fatal decisions, which ultimately led to the slaughter of 342 soldiers. This research provides a contextual account of the Goliad Campaign of 1836, chronicles Colonel Fannin's background, describes force composition and leadership, and finally examines how modern Army leadership doctrine may have been applied during the campaign and how it could have influenced Fannin's decision-making process.

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GOLIAD CAMPAIGN OF 1836 CHRONOLOGY

October

1835----- Fighting erupts between Mexican troops and Texas settlers at Gonzales. Militia company from Matagorda attacks and captures the Presidio La Bahia at Goliad on 9 October.

Oct-Dec

1835----- Texian volunteers besiege General Cos in San Antonio. Cos surrenders on 10 December.

February

1836----- Colonel James W. Fannin, Jr. assumes command of the Texas garrison at the Presidio La Bahia. Garrison strength at 400.

23 Feb

1836----- Santa Anna and vanguard of 1,500 Mexican troops lay siege to the Bexar (San Antonio) garrison, the Alamo.

25 Feb

1836----- The Alamo Task Force Commander, LTC William B. Travis sends appeal for help to Fannin, 90 miles southeast of Bexar.

26 Feb

1836----- Fannin and 320 troops depart Goliad for San Antonio. Carts become nonmission capable a short distance from Goliad. Fannin abandons the march and returns to Presidio La Bahia, now referred to as "Fort Defiance" by the Texians.

27 Feb

1836----- Advancing Mexican forces under General Urrea destroy a Texian outpost at San Patricio, south of Goliad. Urrea continues advance northward.

2 March

1836----- Second Texian outpost destroyed by Urrea's forces at Agua Dulce Creek. Mexican advance continues north toward Refugio, 26 miles south of Goliad.

6 March

1836----- Alamo falls to Santa Anna's assault troops. All 185 defenders are killed.

11 March

1836----- Corresponding from his field headquarters in Gonzales, General Sam Houston informs Fannin of the Alamo's fall and orders him to retreat to Victoria. Fannin receives the order on the 15th.

11 March

1836----- Fannin orders CPT Amon King to take detachment of troops and majority of the garrison's carts and teams to Refugio to aid in evacuation of settlers harassed by Mexican guerrillas.

13 March

1836----- Attacked by guerillas King seeks refuge in old mission and sends for help from Goliad. LTC Ward arrives that night with 120 troops.

14 March

1836----- Ward and King delay departure from Refugio to mount further pursuit of local guerrillas. Urrea's advance guard surprises Ward and forces him to seek cover in local mission. King attempts to hold position along nearby Mission River. Colonel A.C. Horton joins Fannin at Goliad with Cavalry Troop.

17 March

1836----- Fannin learns that Ward and King have been annihilated by Urrea's troops at Refugio. Mexican scouts are encamped within three miles of Goliad, awaiting Urrea's arrival. Fannin tells his offices that they will evacuate the presidio the following day.

18 March

1836----- Anticipating an immediate attack by Urrea, Fannin remains at the Presidio La Bahia. Horton's cavalry exhausts its horses in conducting inconclusive series of skirmishes with Urrea's scouts throughout the day. The oxen used for hauling the Texian supply wagons and artillery go unfed and unwatered throughout the day's excitement.

19 March (A.M.)

1836----- Fannin and his troops depart Fort Defiance at approximately 1000 en route to Victoria. Rations are not issued and water casks are not filled prior to departure. Time is lost moving the artillery pieces and heavily loaded wagons across the ford on the San Antonio River below the presidio. Fannin loses more time when he must halt to allow the hungry oxen graze. Four mounted troopers are tasked as rear guard trailing two miles behind the main body. Horton's cavalry is tasked to secure the crossing site at Coleta Creek, several miles to the east.

19 March (P.M.)

1836----- Urrea's advance guard cavalry surprises and routs Fannin's rearguard.

Caught on the open plain, Fannin deploys his infantry into a hollow square formation surrounding the supply wagons and posting artillery at the corners. Fannin's men repulse repeated attacks, but sharpshooters pick off the Texian's draft animals and artillery crews as their water supplies are quickly exhausted.

20 March

1836----- Fannin surrenders to Urrea "at discretion." Texian POWs are marched back to the Presidio La Bahia and confined to the chapel.

27 March (Palm Sunday)

1836----- Fannin and his men (342 personnel) are executed at Goliad by direct orders from Santa Anna.

21 April

1836----- Houston defeats Santa Anna at San Jacinto.

June

1836----- General Thomas Rusk buries Goliad soldiers' remains with full military honors.

CHAPTER 1

SETTING THE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

Introduction and Background of the Texas Revolution

The events and decisions that led to the worst massacre in Texas history comprise an important case study for the application and synthesis of modern Army leadership doctrine. The Goliad Campaign of 1836 is filled with poignant examples of ineffective methods for exercising modern Army corps values, leader attributes, skills, and decision-making theory. It is not the intent of the thesis to ridicule or exploit the fatal leadership errors of the campaign, but to highlight their root causes and effects. The exponential value of the lessons learned through an increased comprehension of Army leadership doctrine is the intended outcome of the thesis. The research is significant in that many details chronicling the events leading up to the massacre must be thoroughly examined in order to install modern Army leadership doctrine into the lessons learned.

In 1834 Texas was a district of the Mexican state of Coahuila y Texas and its residents, known as Texians, were governed as Mexican citizens. Many Anglo-American immigrants and Tejanos (Mexican Texans) were attracted to the region by generous land policies. As Mexican authorities initiated tighter regulatory controls, civil unrest intensified. When Anastacio Bustamente came to power as the president of Mexico in 1830, his congress passed a decree providing for the colonization of convicts in Texas. The decree authorized establishing military forts in different parts of the state whose officers ignored civil authorities, imprisoned citizens without lawful cause, and refused the right of trial by civil authorities. Needless to say, the constant upheaval precipitated

attitudes of distrust, dissension, and bitterness against Mexican rule and the actions taken by Bustamente.¹

Stephen F. Austin, the most prominent Anglo-American in Texas, was charged with encouraging insurrection by the Mexican constabulary. He had published a letter that incited Texians to organize and become a separate state. President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna assumed dictatorial powers and control of Mexico's military in late 1834. Texians resisted his authority. A convention of Anglo-American settlers established a provisional state government and elected officials. They declared Texians were fighting for rights due to them under the previous Mexican constitutional law of 1824. The first battle of the Texas Revolution occurred in Gonzales on 2 October 1835 with the Texians claiming victory. The Texians routinely defeated the Mexican soldiers in subsequent engagements during the fall of 1835. Mexican garrisons in Goliad and San Antonio were seized and occupied by Texians. Thus, the conditions were set for an embarrassed and vengeful Santa Anna to reclaim Mexico's territory from the belligerent Texians with decisive force.

Texians were extremely confident from key victories throughout the region and did not expect a Mexican counteroffensive until spring of the following year. General Santa Anna, through his vast network of intelligence, became aware of this Texian relaxed defensive posture and seized the initiative by launching a winter invasion. His intent was to surprise the Texians and suppress the rebellion with an overwhelming simultaneous offensive campaign directed at San Antonio and Goliad.

“The Arc of Bexar (San Antonio), Goliad and Copano were considered as a military line of primary importance, and one to be taken or defended at all costs.”² These

decisive locations were often referred to as the *Keys to Texas*. Control of the *Keys* meant unrestricted access to the opening of the Port of Corpus Christie and (potentially) the creation of road and rail infrastructure. As part of the Mexican invasion of Texas in early 1836, General Santa Anna and his main effort of approximately 6,000 men followed an inland route toward San Antonio with the task of destroying the Alamo. Simultaneously, Mexican General Jose Cosme de Urrea with over 1,000 troops departed Matamoros along a coastal route to attack and seize Goliad. Two main roads led to Texas from the Mexican interior. General Santa Anna used the Camino Real as an avenue of approach to San Antonio. The route crossed the Rio Grande at Paso de Francia and wound northeast through San Antonio. General Urrea used the second road, the Atascosito, which stretched from Matamoros on the Rio Grande north through San Patricio, Goliad, and Victoria. Two forts blocked these approaches into Texas: Presidio La Bahia (Nuestra Senora de Loreto Presidio) at Goliad, and the Alamo at San Antonio (fig.1). Each installation functioned as Texian combat security outposts tasked to provide early warning to the Texas settlements of an enemy advance. The town of Goliad held strategic importance because of its location on the Atascosito, which was a key route between San Antonio and the Port of Copano on the Gulf Coast. The Presidio La Bahia, later named Fort Defiance by the Texans, was a well-fortified Spanish bastion elevated above the banks of the San Antonio River.³

In December of 1835, James Walker Fannin Jr. was commissioned by General Sam Houston, unofficial Commander in Chief of the Texas Regular Army, to the rank of colonel and was later *elected* commanding officer of the volunteer regiment at Goliad. He was appointed by the provisional government of Texas as an agent to enlist troops.

He was also granted authorization to contract war supplies for the Texas Republic.

Fannin was a proponent of Texas independence and had previously served as the captain of the Brazos Guards at Gonzales during the first battle of the revolution. Fannin and James Bowie successfully led Texas forces during the Battle at Mission Concepcion, a key victory during the fall of 1835.

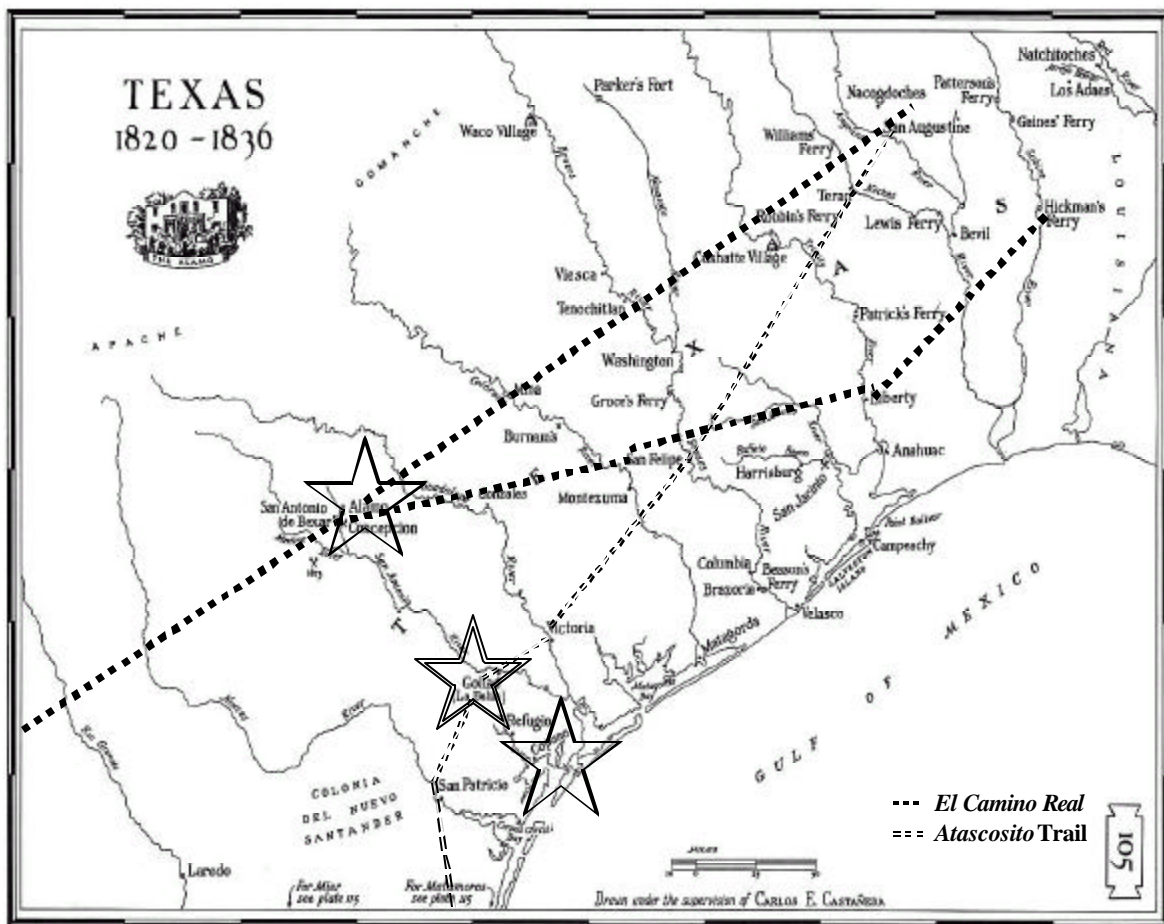


Fig. 1. Map of Texas Territory, 1820-1836. This map was created based on a map used in Carlos E. Castaneda's, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution* (Austin, Texas: Graphic Ideas, Incorporated Publishers, 1970), 93. The graphics depict the major axes leading into Texas from Mexico, the Camino Real and the Atascosito Trail, and *Keys to Texas*.

Born in early 1804 in Georgia, Fannin was adopted by his maternal grandfather, James W. Walker, and raised on a plantation near Marion, Georgia. Following numerous business ventures and stints with the military, he returned to Georgia. He was later married and became the father of two children. In 1834 he and his family moved to Velasco, Texas. Further review of Fannin's background may reveal how his values were shaped and which leadership skills were developed or stymied. The research will provide an understanding of his fundamental leadership philosophy.

This small Texas army under Fannin was a hodgepodge of units brought together from many parts of the American Southwest. The units not only consisted of Texas regulars, but the majority was volunteers from the states of Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Georgia. They went by monikers, such as: the Red Rovers, San Antonio Greys (formerly the New Orleans Greys), Mobile Greys, and Duval's Kentucky Mustangs. Fannin ultimately organized his Goliad command into a single regiment consisting of two battalions, the Georgia Battalion and the LaFayette Battalion. They were considered undisciplined rebel rousers anxious for a fight.

In the months leading up to the Goliad Massacre, Fannin had shown defects as a commander. Accustomed to the discipline of a regular army, he adapted poorly to his situation as “head of volunteers.”⁴ “He scorned the idea of electing officers and was disturbed by the lack of clearly defined hierarchy among his forces.”⁵ His perceived arrogance and ambition earned him the contempt of many of the men under his command. What interpersonal skills were required of Fannin to deal with such a motley

crew? This thesis will examine the effect on his ability to lead and influence the men of Goliad.

From 12 February to 12 March 1836, General Sam Houston took a leave of absence and Fannin acted as Commander in Chief (CINC) of the Texas Army during this time. In mid-February 1836, Fannin dispatched an expedition to Matamoros to assist Mexican Federalists, who were opposed to Santa Anna's centralist government, and occupy the strategically located Port of Copano. The Mexican (Centralist) task force, commanded by General Urrea, had concentrated at Matamoros in late January and was accumulating provisions and reinforcements for the campaign. Urrea's objectives were San Patricio, Goliad, and Victoria in order to facilitate access to the Gulf of Mexico.

During the expedition, Fannin was warned that San Antonio and Goliad were to be attacked simultaneously and a trap awaited Texians in Matamoros. Fannin, unaware of the enemy's occupation at Matamoros, had already committed a company-sized element to the region to assist and protect Texas settlers. Without communication to his committed forces, Fannin assumed difficulty and ordered a larger number of reinforcements to salvage the company. If the situation could not get any worse, it somehow did. The reinforcing unit became disoriented while enroute to Matamoros and had to return to Goliad. The following day, Fannin allowed the rescue party to resume its march to Matamoros with the same task and purpose. The leaders of both elements met in San Patricio, but disagreed on whom would lead the task force and failed to gain unity of command. The units went their separate ways. Eventually, the majority of both parties were killed or captured by Urrea at the Battle of Refugio on 12 March 1836.

Concurrently, Fannin directed his troops at Goliad to fortify the Presidio La Bahia to prepare for Urrea's impending attack.

At this juncture Colonel William B. Travis, Commander of San Antonio (Bexar), sent couriers to Fannin to request reinforcing support to defend the Alamo, which was under siege from General Santa Anna's forces. Travis viewed the Alamo as the Texan center of gravity and suggested that Fannin relocate his headquarters to San Antonio and consolidate forces to defeat the Mexicans. So what was Fannin's higher commander's guidance and intent? Granted, he was the acting Commander in Chief during this time, but it will be important to determine how the command authority of the time was structured and how it communicated its vision and direction to commanders in the field.

The work at Fort Defiance was still unfinished when Fannin redirected his men to relieve Travis at San Antonio on 25 February 1836. Unfortunately, the march to San Antonio ended on the banks of a river ford only two miles from Fort Defiance. "Wagons broke down, oxen strayed, and provisions were scarce. Fannin's men lacked shoes and clothing."⁶ Fannin aborted the mission and returned to Fort Defiance. The two-day attempt to relieve Travis cost Fannin precious time and caused bitter resentment among many of his men. What led to Fannin's indecisiveness in reinforcing the Alamo when requested by Colonel Travis?

On 12 March, General Sam Houston, now officially appointed Commander of the Texas Army by the provisional government, returned to power. On 14 March, Fannin received orders from General Houston to retreat to Victoria. Fannin delayed for five days before executing the order. By this time Urrea's cavalry was within striking distance of Goliad, Fannin finally decided to evacuate on 19 March. He and his men were enveloped

by Urrea's forces in an open field and forced to surrender at the Battle of Coleto. The Texians were imprisoned by the Mexicans at Goliad and subsequently murdered by order of General Santa Anna.

The Making of a Leader: James Walker Fannin Jr.

It is believed that Fannin was born illegitimate to a veteran of the United States Army Dr. (Major) Isham S. Fannin, who distinguished himself in the War of 1812. Young Fannin's mother was the daughter of an employee on the elder Fannin's brother's plantation in Georgia. According to several accounts, young Fannin suffered a difficult and sometimes troubled childhood. Early on, he was sent to live with his mother's family where his maternal grandfather adopted him.⁷

When Isham Fannin died on 26 April 1817, it is unknown whether he regretted his rejection of young Fannin and his refusal to accept fatherly responsibility for the boy. It appears that Fannin's rejection by his father and the circumstances of his birth dogged him emotionally throughout his life. The service records of his father in the War of 1812 and his grandfather in the Revolutionary War may have been a factor in his selection to the United States Military Academy in 1819. At the age of fourteen years and six months, he enrolled at West Point under his adopted name, "James Fannin Walker." At the time of his admission, his guardian was listed as Abraham B. Fleming of Savannah, Georgia.⁸

Fannin completed his fourth class year (freshman) ending June 1820. His troubles began when he got into a serious fistfight with a fellow student in November of 1821. By 21 January 1821, he was failing French and had been remanded back to the fourth class. In addition to having academic difficulties, his conduct record was also

suspect. He was liberally punished or assigned extra duty for absences or tardiness for roll calls, classes, and formations. In October of the same year he was listed as “absent without leave,” and on 1 November 1821 the superintendent of West Point wrote, “I have the honor to enclose the resignation of Cadets James F. Walker of Georgia and Cyrus Canon and recommend that they be accepted to take effect on the 30th of November.”⁹ Exactly what happened to James Fannin between 29 October and 20 November of 1821 is not known, but it effectively put an end to his preparations to become a military officer. At least two accounts report that he got into a serious fistfight with another cadet--supposedly over a comment derogatory toward the South. He is listed simply as “resigned to take effect 20 November 1821,” which was actually ten days before the superintendent's recommendation.

There are no records to substantiate the theory that he resigned after a fight or perhaps even a duel rather than accept punishment by Army authorities. West Point archives contain a letter from Fannin's cousin addressed to him at the academy dated 3 October 1821. The document suggests his departure from the academy was the result of a personal situation.

Dear Cousin [Martha Holt]

By the request of your Grandmother and Mother I forward you this and hope you will not delay in returning home for they are very low indeed and are not expected to survive many months and if you do not come shortly it is probable you will never see them again for you Grand--mother has entirely lost the use of one side by the dead Palsey and the old Gentleman as you know has the shaking Palsey and so very bad that he cannot carry anything to his mouth. I presume I need not say anything more at present as you are not ignorant of their extreme old age so be in haste and gratify your relations for they are all very anxious for you return and do not delay as you observed in your last letter until June go immediately on the reception of this to the superintendent and inform him of these things and I have no doubt but what he will permit you to return. Your Uncle Fannin passed

by here a few weeks since on his say to [unintelligible] for his health and he will return to Savannah as soon as the sickly season is over and he recover his health.

With respect and great esteem, I am your relative,

D. Walker¹⁰

For whatever reason he resigned his position at West Point--duel or family emergency, James Fannin Walker wrote the superintendent three weeks after his cousin's letter:

Sir

Circumstances not admitting my longer stay at the Milty. Acdy. I hereby offer this as my resignation of the Appointment of Cadet in the U.S. Army.

I remain Sir

Your Obs.

James F. Walker¹¹

Of eighty-six classmates, he finished sixty-second in mathematics, fifty-seventh in French, and sixtieth in "order of general merit." It was obvious from the beginning of his military career that academics would not be a strength. While he attended West Point for just over two years and was remanded back to the freshman class, it should be noted that Fannin received no advanced training in military tactics, theories of warfare, histories of previous battles, fortification logistics, transportation, or intelligence gathering.¹²

After leaving the academy, Fannin returned to Georgia and resided in Twiggs and Troup counties, then to Columbus Georgia in Muskogee County in the late 1820s. He became a merchant. He also managed to become Secretary of a Temperance Society and a division inspector of the Georgia militia. He married Minerva Fort and on 17 July, 1829 Missouri Pinkney, their first daughter was born. Fannin appears to have been a

devoted family man, often exhibiting public displays of affection to his wife and family. In early 1832 his youngest daughter, Minerva was born severely retarded.

During the early 1830s, Fannin was believed to be struggling financially and with his self-image. Georgia plantation society, finances, and personal pride were important aspects of southern gentry. While his sister Eliza was living with her mother and a stepfather who could afford to send her to a northern finishing school, he was struggling to purchase a carriage for his wife and baby daughter. In 1830, he reportedly was elected judge of the Troup County Court, but was disqualified for allegedly having fought in a duel. By mid-1832, Fannin had become a slave trader who often characterized his excursions as “cargoes of sugar.”¹³ Although United States law authorized the practice of slavery, it did ban the importation of new slaves from Africa. It was illegal under the laws of Mexico to transport slaves into Texas, but Fannin regularly conducted business there despite the laws. Apparently, he circumvented the Mexican regulations by declaring the slaves in his possession as free men. Once past the Mexican port of entry, Fannin sold the slaves locally or shipped them to Louisiana for trade. According to his own records, Fannin made numerous trips into Texas.¹⁴

In 1834, the Sabine Lake between Louisiana and the Mexican province of Texas, was the “established” importation point for illegal slaves introduced to the United States. On 2 May 1834, a contract for the purchase of a schooner called the Crawford was made for five thousand dollars in Havana, Cuba. Per the ship's manifest, it was sailing from Havana on 12 June for the Brazos River in Texas with a cargo of sixteen free Negroes. It is reported that Fannin swore before the United States consul in Havana to the fact that the ship would be continuing on to New Orleans where payment for the boat would be

made. This oath was necessary for permission to sail to Texas because of Mexican laws banning the import of slaves. The sixteen free Negroes were unloaded in Velasco; however, Fannin failed to realize enough cash in the transaction to pay for the boat in New Orleans. On 22 August 1834 he was in Mobile, Alabama, requesting that he be granted an extension on the payment for the boat based upon another planned trip to Havana.¹⁵ By this time, he had established himself as a resident in Austin's Colony in Texas and operated a plantation along the San Bernard River in conjunction with Joseph Mims.

Fannin made numerous trips into Texas on these slave trips, and during this time he became enamored with the great frontier and the people who populated it. In the autumn of 1834 Fannin decided to make his permanent home in the Mexican territory. He moved his family to Texas and settled at Velasco with the intention of becoming a gentlemen farmer and plantation owner.¹⁶

Upon his arrival, Fannin was broke financially and had very few assets. A letter of introduction to Samuel M. Williams, a prominent landowner supports this claim. "I believe he [Fannin] is an enterprising man and from what I can learn, he is worth nothing and perhaps as we say, 'worse than nothing,' and his case is desperate, for he has nothing to lose and all to gain."¹⁷ He had borrowed heavily to buy his boat and then had to mortgage the boat to buy the large parcel of land in Texas. Once he stopped selling slaves, his income fell dramatically, and he began missing payments to creditors. While visiting in New Orleans in April 1835, Fannin was arrested for nonpayment of a \$3,000 debt he owed to Theophilus Hyde, the man from whom he had purchased the boat.¹⁸ Fannin spent three days in jail until he was able to post a \$1,500 bond--apparently using

money he borrowed from an acquaintance and fellow slave-trader known only as Kenan. Kenan later filed suit against Fannin's estate seeking repayment of the loan. At about the same time, Fannin also developed an affinity for gambling. Samuel Whitting filed a claim against Fannin's estate, for \$415 as the result of a card game.¹⁹

Although Fannin was apparently a poor businessman and even worse gambler, there are indications he was an enthusiast for the growing Texas independence movement--influenced by outspoken and charismatic leaders, like Ben Milam and Jim Bowie. Perhaps he may have chosen to come to Texas specifically for the purpose of participating in the coming revolt. Fannin became an “agitator” for the Texas revolution and on 20 August 1835 was appointed by the Committee of Safety and Correspondence of Columbia to use his influence for the calling of the consultation. On 27 August he wrote to a United States Army officer in Georgia requesting financial aid for the Texas cause and West Point officers to command the Texas Army. In September, Fannin became active in the volunteer army and subscribed money to an expedition to capture the *Veracruzana*, a Mexican ship at Copano. The expedition did not materialize, and Fannin went to Gonzales, where, as Captain of the Brazos Guards, he participated in the battle of Gonzales on 2 October 1835.²⁰

Texas was desperately seeking leaders with military experience. While Fannin had never fought a single battle, he had been to West Point, even if only for two years. That schooling alone gave him a reputation as an experienced military leader--a reputation which Fannin seemed to enjoy. Because Fannin was still the owner of his own ship, he bore the honorary title of “captain,” and many of his friends probably assumed “captain” was a military rank, earned at West Point or in the regular Army. Fannin

apparently did not discourage such speculation.²¹ Thus, at the age of thirty Fannin enjoyed a wholly undeserved reputation as a talented and knowledgeable military officer - exactly the sort of man Texas needed as a leader in the revolt against Mexico (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Portrait of James Walker Fannin Jr. Reprinted from Wallace L. McKeehan's, *Official Communications- La Bahia, 1836*; available from <http://www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/goliadofficial.htm>; Internet; accessed on 5 December 2001.

If Fannin ever told anyone he had no practical military experience, limited training, and highly questionable military skills, that message is lost. Instead, he basked in the respect he now commanded among his new Texas neighbors and perhaps, at least to some degree, may even have begun to believe some of their adulation. It is not surprising that Fannin soon was in the forefront of the Texas struggle for independence.

During this time of revolution, Texians viewed anyone possessing any degree of military experience as a capable “leader.” The choices for *qualified* leaders were limited, and when compared to others, who were part of this independence movement, Fannin's resume may have been the most impressive--after all, he had attended West Point and was a combat-tested officer. Character, sound judgment, and the ability to lead men were assumed to correspond with military education and experience.

James Fannin's skills as a leader would be thoroughly challenged when faced with directing an assortment of novice volunteers, mainly from the southern states, who were not accustomed to discipline and “itching” for a fight with the Mexicans.

¹Gary Brown, *Hesitant Martyr in the Texas Revolution* (Plano, Texas: Republic of Texas Press, 2000, 23.

²Stephen L. Hardin, *Texian Iliad: A Military History of the Texas Revolution* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1978), 34.

³State Parks and Historical Sites, <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/fannin/fannin.htm>, accessed 5 Sep 2001.

⁴Harbert Davenport, “Men of Goliad,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 43 (July 1939), 2.

⁵*Ibid.*, 2.

⁶Davenport, 11.

⁷Brown, 4.

⁸*Ibid.*, 5.

⁹*Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰United States Military Academy Archives, National Archives Microfilm Publication 2047, *Engineer Department Letters Received Relating to the U.S. Military Academy*.

¹¹*Ibid.*

- ¹²Brown, 8.
- ¹³Ibid., 17.
- ¹⁴Robert J. Scott, *After the Alamo* (Plano, Texas: Republic of Texas Press, 2000), 25.
- ¹⁵Brown, 21
- ¹⁶Scott, 26.
- ¹⁷Ibid., 27
- ¹⁸Clinton P. Hartmann, The Texas State Historical Society, 2001, *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/FF/ffa2.html>, accessed 5 Sep 2001.
- ¹⁹Ibid.
- ²⁰Scott, 26.
- ²¹Ibid., 27.

CHAPTER 2

FORCE COMPOSITION AND LEADERSHIP

The New Orleans Greys

Several units involved in the Texas Revolution used the name “Greys” or “Grays,” but the first and premier unit to enter Texas using the name was a unit comprised of two companies from New Orleans, Louisiana. Unlike the units formed in Georgia and Alabama, the Greys units were not local. The rosters for the two units include men from eighteen states as well as members from England, Ireland, Germany, Wales, Scotland, and Canada. Thus the Greys were, for all practical purposes, a multinational mercenary unit and like, the Georgian volunteers, the Greys represented a cross-spectrum of young men clamoring for a fight in Mexico.¹

The New Orleans Greys, two companies of United States volunteers that served together in the Texas Revolution, were organized at a meeting held in the Grand Coffee Room of Bank's Arcade in New Orleans on the evening of 13 October 1835. The arcade owner Thomas Banks was a supporter of Texas independence, and his building on Magazine Street was often used for meetings in the service of Texas independence. Nacogdoches alcalde Nicholas Sterne was present at this meeting and offered weapons to the first fifty men who would volunteer for Texas. By the meeting's adjournment, nearly 120 men had been recruited (no original muster role exists). Two companies were formed, the first under Captain Thomas Breece and the second under Captain Robert Morris. “Both companies aggregated over 100 men and both called themselves the New Orleans Greys.”²

The two companies left New Orleans within two days of each other. Breece took an overland route, traversing the Mississippi and Red Rivers aboard the steamer *Washita*. His company disembarked at Alexandria and then followed the Old Spanish Trail crossing into Texas at Gaines Ferry. Between the ferry and San Augustine, “a delegation of local women welcomed the company and presented it with a blue silk banner that bore the words ‘First Company of Texan Volunteers from New Orleans.’”³ The company was welcomed with a public dinner at San Augustine and later Nacogdoches where about two-thirds of the company were given horses before proceeding to San Antonio.

Morris' sixty-eight-man company sailed from New Orleans and arrived at Velasco on 22 October 1835. There, elections were held for company officers, and Morris was reconfirmed as captain. William Gordon Cooke of Virginia became second officer. Morris' company proceeded to Brazoria by steamship and marched inland to Victoria, where some of the men were issued horses. The remaining men secured mounts at Presidio La Bahia. The company then proceeded to San Antonio to join the Texas army. They arrived before Breece's company.⁴

In San Antonio Morris was appointed a major and assumed command of a division made up of both companies of Greys. It would be Morris who would later send an urgent letter to Fannin from San Patricio, warning of the impending massive Mexican assault on Goliad and Bexar. The message convinced Fannin to withdraw to Goliad and fortify. Cooke assumed command of Morris' old company. Cooke noted that seventy men were in his company and fifty in Breece's.⁵ The Greys took an active part in the siege of Bexar in December of 1835. Breece's company took casualties during the engagement: one killed and two wounded in action. Cooke's company suffered six

wounded. Following the capture of Bexar both companies underwent a series of organizational changes as a result of the Matamoros expedition of 1836. All but twenty-two members of Breece's company and one of Cooke's company left San Antonio under Francis White Johnson and James Grant. Those who remained at San Antonio were under the command of Captain John James Baugh. When Baugh became garrison adjutant, William Blazeby took command of the company. Tragically, all members later died in The Battle of the Alamo. The company standard was among the flags captured by the Mexicans.⁶

The Greys who went south with Grant and Johnson became members of either the San Antonio Greys under Cooke or the Mobile Greys under Captain David Burke. Cooke relinquished his command to Samuel O. Pettus in 1836 and joined Sam Houston. Although a number of Greys continued with Grant, including both Morris and Breece, most chose to become part of the garrison at Goliad under Colonel James W. Fannin Jr. By the time the Greys were united with Fannin, they had become the most combat-experienced soldiers in the Texas Revolution.⁷

Nathaniel R. Brister of the Greys was promoted to regimental adjutant when Fannin reorganized his command in February. Both Morris and Pettus would later be killed with Grant. Nineteen members of Cooke's old company were eventually killed in the Goliad Massacre. Four members of the Greys escaped from the massacre, including William L. Hunter and Hermann Ehrenberg. Three, including Joseph H. Spahn, were spared. The disasters at the Alamo and Goliad destroyed the New Orleans Greys as military units. The Greys under the command of Fannin exemplified the best and most experienced soldiers Texas could muster in 1836. By the time Fannin assumed

leadership over the Greys at Goliad, they had served in various assignments as infantry, cavalry, and artillerymen. “He desperately needed the Greys--they were literally his universal soldiers at La Bahia.”⁸

The Alabama Red Rovers

Alabama's contributions in money and manpower to the Texas Revolution were also substantial. Perhaps the most recognizable were the Alabama Red Rovers. The Red Rovers, a volunteer military company, participated in the campaign as a unit of the Lafayette Battalion of James W. Fannin's regiment. The unit was organized by its commander, Captain (Doctor) Jack Shackelford, at Courtland, Alabama, in November 1835. Shackelford began efforts to raise a company of men from Courtland and the surrounding Tennessee Valley for service in support of Texas' revolt against Mexico.⁹

Prior to organizing the Red Rovers, Shackelford had enjoyed both a profitable medical practice and a productive cotton plantation with several slaves. He was active in the Democratic Party as a state representative and staunch supporter of Andrew Jackson. Additionally, he helped finance the construction of the Tuscumbia, Courtland, and Decatur Railroad, completed in 1834 as the first railway in Alabama. The railroad, however, was reportedly a failure. “Equipment was inadequate, the train kept no regular schedule, and the iron rails were too light and began to sag. Often the steam engine would not run and mules pulled the cars.”¹⁰

Faced with such business reversals, one wonders at Shackelford's state of mind when he read the following plea from General Sam Houston, commanding the Republic of Texas army and seeking support for Texas' revolt against the Mexicans, published in the Huntsville *Democrat* in 1835:

If Volunteers from the United States will join their brethren in this section, they will receive liberal bounties of land. We have millions of acres of our best land unchosen and unappropriated. Let each man come with a good rifle and 100 rounds of ammunition--and come soon. Our war-cry is "Liberty or Death." Our principles are to support the Constitution, and DOWN WITH THE USURPER!¹¹

It is quite possible that Shackelford's motives were less financially motivated.

Many of the Anglos who had settled in Texas were originally from Alabama, and many Alabama families had relatives in the then-Mexican colony of Texas. Only Tennessee had provided more settlers to Texas than Alabama.

Whatever their motives, Courtland's citizens soon acted upon Houston's appeals for help. Shackelford began efforts to raise a company of men from Courtland and the surrounding Tennessee Valley for service in support of Texas' revolt against Mexico.

With local financing, Shackelford soon raised a company of approximately fifty-five volunteers. Courtland women worked day and night to outfit Shackelford's men. They sewed uniforms that consisted of "linsy-woolsey" fringe-trimmed hunting shirts with bright red, green, and brown checks and jean trousers tied bright red to match their shirts. The final product inspired the locals to dub Shackelford's company the "Red Rovers." A simple red flag provided the Red Rovers with their company guidon.¹²

Topped with coonskin caps, sporting large hunting knives strapped to their hips, and carrying muskets supplied by Alabama's state arsenal (for a cost of \$600), the Red Rovers boarded the cars of the Tuscumbia, Decatur, and Courtland Railroad on 12 December 1835. The shouts and well wishes of the entire town of Courtland rang in their ears as the Red Rovers--consisting of half of the male adult population of Courtland, to include practically all of its young men--left town aboard the railroad's mule-drawn cars.¹³

The company, which mustered about seventy men, was equipped with rifles and military supplies from the Alabama state arsenal. The Red Rovers remained in camp at Courtland until 12 December 1835, when they started for Texas. They landed at New Orleans on 1 January 1836. After being inspected by Stephen F. Austin and Nicholas Adolphus Sterne, the company reached Texas on 19 January 1836. Despite their enthusiasm to join the fray, the Red Rovers were delayed for two weeks at the coast while Shackelford attempted to ascertain the whereabouts of the Texan army. The men remained at Dimitt's Landing until accepted for Texas service on 3 February. They were publicly entertained when they arrived at Victoria on their way to Goliad. Dr. Joseph H. Barnard accompanied the unit from Matagorda to Goliad, where the Red Rovers arrived on 12 February and were assigned to the Lafayette Battalion.¹⁴

During their short history in south Texas, the Alabama Red Rovers would serve in several campaigns and fight with distinction at the Battle of Coleto.

Other Alabama Volunteers

The Red Rovers were not the only Alabama volunteer units found in the Republic of Texas' order of battle. Huntsville contributed as many as seventy men in a company known as the Huntsville Volunteers under the command of Wyatt. Montgomery sent the Alabama Greys, later known as the "fourth company" of the Georgia Battalion, under the command of Isaac Ticknor. Mobile provided the Mobile Greys, commanded by David Burke. The Alabama Red Rovers, Wyatt's Huntsville Company, Ticknor's Alabama Greys, and Burke's Mobile Greys accounted for approximately 175 Alabama volunteers in Fannin's command at one time or another during the early period of the campaign.¹⁵

Duval's Kentucky Mustangs

The Kentucky Mustangs, one of the six companies of the Second (LaFayette) battalion, served under Colonel Fannin at Goliad. Fannin merged Burr H. Duval's Kentucky Riflemen with Benjamin L. Lawrence's Tennessee volunteers. The volunteers had been formed in Nacogdoches in December 1835. Duval was placed in command of the new company.

While the Kentucky volunteers were garrisoned at Goliad under Duval's command, they received their unit citation, the "Mustangs." Duval later wrote,

Not long after our arrival at Goliad the soubiquet of mustangs or wild horses was acquired by our company from the following incident: Merrifield, our second lieutenant, was a man of great physical powers, but withal one of the most peaceful and most genial men when not under the influence of liquor. But occasionally he would bet on a "spree" and then he was as wild as a "March hare" and perfectly uncontrollable. The Mexicans seemed to know him and to fear him, also, and when he was on one of his "benders" they would retreat into their houses as soon as they saw him and shut their doors. This proceeding, of course, was calculated to irritate Merrifield, and he would forthwith kick the door from its hinges. On a certain occasion he battered down the doors of half a dozen houses in one street, and from that time the Mexicans called him the "Mustang," and finally the name was applied to the company.¹⁶

Burr H. Duval was born in Nelson County, Kentucky, in 1809. He was educated at St. Joseph's College in Bardstown, Kentucky, and was one of three brothers who aided the Texas struggle for independence from Mexico. He was elected captain of the company of Kentucky Riflemen that formed at Bardstown in November 1835. The group, which included Duval's brother, John Crittenden Duval, marched to Louisville, traveled by steamer to New Orleans, and on 28 December 1835, landed at Quintana, Texas, Velasco's rival town at the mouth of the Brazos River. The company reported to

the provisional government two days later, when Duval requested that they be mustered as mounted rangers.

The men served briefly, as John C. Duval recorded, as “a kind of marine corps” aboard the Texan vessel *Invincible* while it searched in vain for the Mexican privateer *Bravo* before returning to Quintana. About the middle of January 1836 the company sailed to Copano, then a principal Texas port on Arkansas Bay, and marched to Refugio and subsequently to Goliad, where the men became part of Fannin's Provisional Regiment of Volunteers. This unit, along with Ira Westover's regulars, David N. Burke's Mobile Greys, Samuel Overton Pettus' San Antonio Greys, Benjamin F. Bradford's Alabama Greys, Amon B. King's Kentucky Volunteers, and John Shackelford's Red Rovers, formed the LaFayette Battalion, commanded by Benjamin C. Wallace. Fannin's artillery was provided by Captain Luis Guerra's company of Mexican artillerymen and the Texan regular artillery from Westover's command.¹⁷

In a letter to his father dated 9 March 1836, Duval wrote that, unlike himself, Fannin “is unpopular” and that only “the certainty of hard fighting, and *that shortly*, could have kept us together so long.” He also wrote of his comrades that “no man ever thinks of retreat, or surrender, they must be exterminated to be whipped.”¹⁸

The Georgia Battalion

The Georgia Battalion of Permanent Volunteers, which became part of James W. Fannin's provisional regiment in the Goliad Campaign of 1836, occupies a unique position in the Texas Revolution, since Georgia was possibly the only state in the Union to supply arms during the conflict from its state arsenal to a Texas volunteer force.

In response to appeals from Texas patriots, Ward proposed at a public meeting in Macon on 12 November 1835 to form a company of infantry to aid the cause. With the aid of Dr. Robert Collins, he enlisted 120 men from Macon, Milledgeville, and Columbus; formed them into three companies; and armed, supplied, and transported the unit to Texas at his personal expense and with the aid of the State of Georgia arsenal. William Ward, a native of Macon, Georgia, recruited and organized the three original companies of what became the Georgia Battalion under Fannin at Goliad. As commander of this “noble company of Riflemen,” Ward left Georgia with a letter of introduction to General Stephen F. Austin from Dr. Collins and with a letter to the government of Texas requesting, “that you will permit them to occupy such post, where most danger is to be met and most honor won.”¹⁹

The journey to Texas brought the unit through Knoxville, Georgia, where Johanna Troutman presented the soldiers with a Lone Star flag bearing the mottoes, “*Ubi Libertas habitat, ibi nostra patria est*” (“Where liberty dwells, there is our country”), and “Texas and Liberty.” Ward continued recruiting volunteers along the way to New Orleans until the battalion numbered about 220 men. On 20 December 1835 the unit landed at Velasco, Texas, where Ward and his men presented their service to Fannin on 23 December. The men were greeted personally by Fannin--he himself a native Georgian.

The Georgia Battalion was officially organized, and its officers elected upon its arrival at Refugio on 14 February 1836. When Ward and his men reached Refugio, he was elected lieutenant colonel. By then, Isaac Ticknor's company of the Alabama Greys had been added to the unit. Attached to Ticknor's company was Luis Guerra's artillery company, a remnant of Mexía's expedition. The Georgia Battalion accompanied Fannin

to Goliad, where Amon B. King's Kentucky volunteers also became part of the force, but Guerra's artillerymen, not wishing to fight their own country, departed and later joined the Mexican army.²⁰

At Goliad, Fannin reorganized his provisional regiment of approximately 400 men, garrisoned at Fort Defiance (*Presidio La Bahía*), into two battalions--the First, or Georgia Battalion, and the Second, or LaFayette Battalion (fig. 3). The former included the five companies of Amon King, Isaac Ticknor, Uriah Irwin Bullock, James C. Winn, and William A. O. Wadsworth, with Warren J. Mitchell serving as battalion major. Joseph M. Chadwick, later Fannin's adjutant general, was sergeant major; and John Sowers Brooks, later Fannin's aide-de-camp, became battalion adjutant. William Ward was elected lieutenant colonel of the regiment, the ranking officer on Fannin's staff.²¹

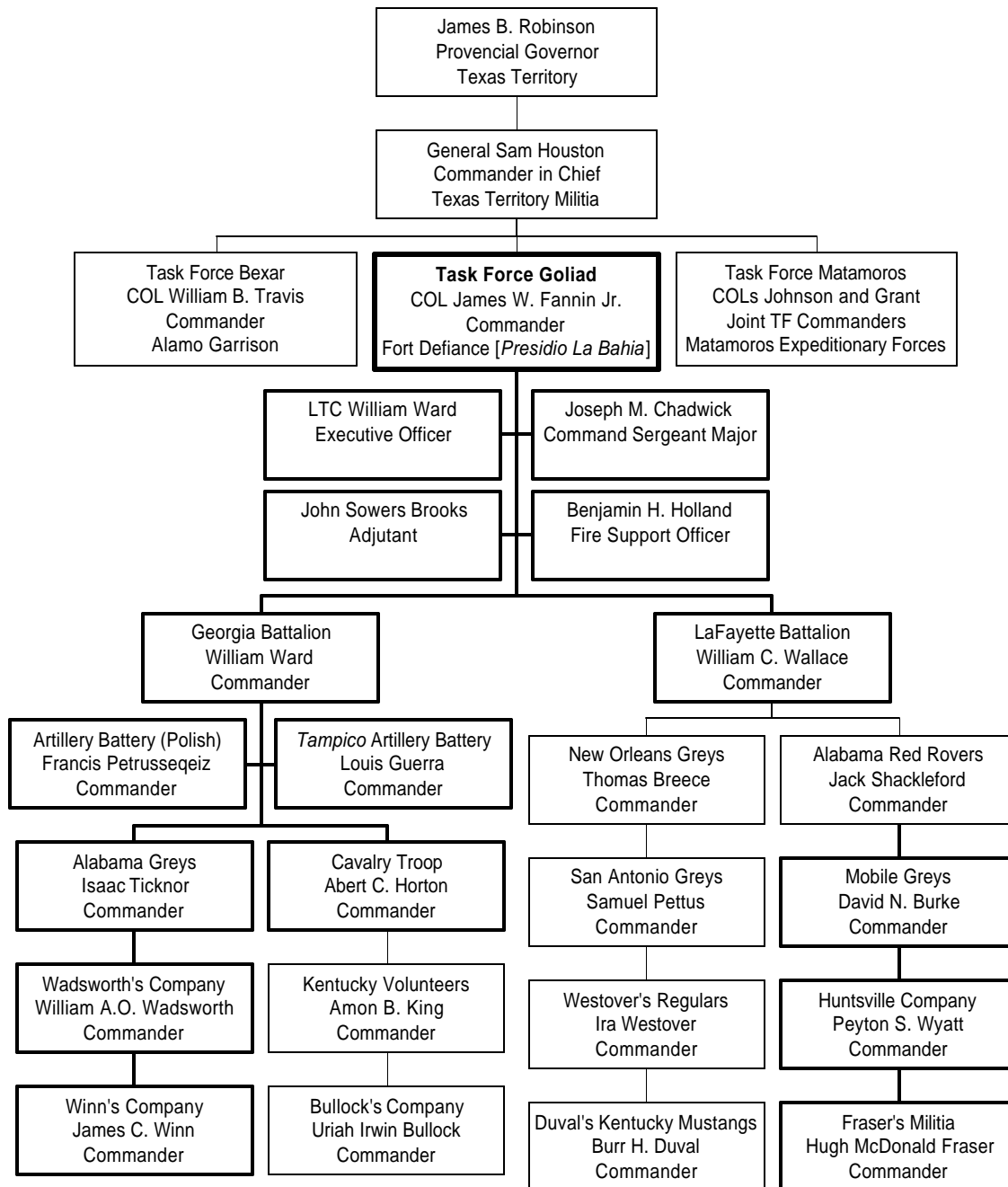


Fig. 3. Goliad Campaign of 1836 Command Relationships Wiring Diagram

General Description of the Mexican Army

The Mexican Army was in a state of disarray at the beginning of the Texas Revolution. Years of civil turmoil and political upheaval had nearly crippled it as an effective field force. It traditionally consisted of units drawn from two main components: the regular army (*Ejercito Permanente*) and the territorial militia (*Milicia Activa*), which was a force similar to a National Guard force. In 1835 this understrength force was reorganized to form an army whose training and equipment approached contemporary European standards. Out of this reorganization emerged ten regular battalions of infantry. Each battalion consisted of six companies of line infantry (*fusiliers*) and one each of grenadiers and chasseurs (light infantry for scouting and skirmishing). During engagements, the grenadier and chasseur companies of each battalion were often detached from their parent units and temporarily consolidated into elite special purpose battalions. These regular battalions were joined in service as necessary by the militia units and an auxiliary force composed of eight “standing companies,” whose precise purpose remains unclear.

The standard infantry weapon was the .75-caliber, muzzleloading flintlock “Brown Bess” musket that was purchased as surplus from the British government in large numbers. The weapon's accuracy was inconsistent against individual man-sized targets at distances greater than 50 meters, but when engaged in massed volley fire it was effective against troops in close formations up to 500 meters. The light infantrymen were often armed with another surplus British arm, the Baker rifle. The soldier who carried the Baker or the “Brown Bess” into battle typically stood less than 5 ½ feet tall and had rarely handled a firearm before entering the Mexican Army.

The Mexican Army's cavalry also consisted of regulars and militia units. In late 1835 the mounted arm consisted of six regular regiments. Each regiment consisted of four squadrons of two companies each with a squad of mounted engineers attached to the regimental headquarters for special duties. There were also six militia cavalry regiments, each following a similar scheme or organization, which allotted eighty-one officers and men to each company. The units were further supplemented by auxiliaries, such as ranchero horsemen who were recruited locally for temporary service, and the presidial cavalry, "those hard-riding Indian fighters stationed in frontier outposts."²² Straight-bladed sabers, lances, and surplus British carbines and pistols formed their armament. The Mexican lancers were greatly feared by the Texan infantry. One of these infantrymen, writing to the *New Orleans Bulletin*, plainly stated this apprehension.

The enemy have a well appointed cavalry. . . . Our riflemen are a deadly species of troops, as all the world knows, but in the prairies they will be powerless against cavalry. . . . If caught in the the open, the Mexican Cavalry would be on us with sword and lance before we could reload, and then our only recourse would be to club our rifles.²³

Mexican artillery had a superior reputation. It was often trained and commanded by European mercenaries who had learned their profession in the Napoleonic Wars. The smoothbore cannon were of diverse caliber, ranging from small guns to siege pieces capable of firing twenty-four-pound projectiles.

Mexican logistics began to break down almost immediately after launching the campaign. Battalions carried only one month's rations, and Santa Anna had issued strict orders to economize with the greatest care. His orders were obeyed. Each soldier was limited to eight ounces of hardtack or toasted corn cake per day. Scarcity of water also proved a difficulty. Both mules and teamsters were in short supply. As was the custom,

the government hired men to handle the supply carts. The logistics system was further taxed by the large following of women and children, which was an established institution of the Mexican military. Providing comfort from the rigors of campaigning, *soldaderas* (soldiers' women) served as cooks, foragers, and nurses. Conventional wisdom held that if the women were sent home, half the army would follow.

The typical Mexican soldier was physically toughened by the hardships of his existence and could display great courage when properly led. Conscripts formed the bulk of the troops and many believed they would be trained on the march. It was the quality of leadership that posed the greatest problem for the Mexican forces. The officer corps was largely drawn from the upper classes of Mexican society, whose members felt little sense of obligation toward those of less wealth or social standing. Professional training was rare among the junior officers, and the senior commanders were often deeply involved in the innumerable political alliances and conspiracies that saw the army play a dominant role in the nation's politics.²⁴

The relative inexperience of the troops was not the only drawback. The tactical organization of the army was woefully outdated and reflected the Mexican military's strong attachment to its Spanish past. The principal campaign planners of the Texas campaign had learned their trade from Spanish military service, and education that had left an indelible stamp on their thinking. Separated by tradition and distance from the recent innovations in European weapon technology and tactical practice, Mexican officers clung to doctrines that were already dated at Waterloo in 1815. Mexican officials changed title pages, but otherwise adopted the Spanish drill manuals verbatim.

The past dominated the thinking of many Mexican officers, but one figure of their recent past stood preeminent--Napoleon Bonaparte.

Napoleon made such an impression on the Mexican Commander in Chief Santa Anna that he patterned himself as the “Napoleon of the West!” Napoleon's panache, uniform, and mannerisms were more closely emulated than his superior tactical abilities and leadership attributes. Santa Anna had confidence in his artillery, cavalry, and infantry. His strategy, like Napoleon, was to crush the insurgents in a series of conventionally pitched battles where volley, mass, and mobility could be used to his advantage. To him, the conditions were favorable for his force of 6,000 to defeat numerically inferior volunteers in standard engagements, despite the vast majority of his army consisting of ill-trained, poorly equipped troops. William Houston Jack, a member of the Committee of Safety and Correspondence, wrote:

They [the Mexicans] have the numerical strength. They have artillery, cavalry, muskets, bayonets lances, against all these you present a band (brave perhaps to a fault) of untrained militia, with such arms only as could be produced in an emergency. The case being then, I give it as my decided opinion, that an engagement might not be risked, unless success is next to certain.²⁵

Mexican Army Campaign Plan

Far to the south, Santa Anna was preoccupied with concentrating the largest number of Mexican military forces that might ever be assembled for the purpose of war. The main bodies of the 2nd and 3rd Divisions had reached Saltillo during the first half of January 1836. These forces combined with units at Monclova and Presidio de Rio Grande, totaled more than 6,000 troops (fig. 4).²⁶



Fig. 4. Map and Graphics of General Santa Anna's Campaign Plan. Reprinted from Robert F. Burke's, "A Test of Leadership: The Campaign in Texas, 1835-36," *Command* 48, no. 27 (March-April 1994): 55.

In addition to the combatants, there was the burden of civilian camp followers, whose numbers easily equaled half the size of the fighting army. Though at times a nuisance, they played a vital role in scouring the nearby countryside for food, water, firewood, and other necessities for the men while on the march.

From the outset there had been a considerable difference of opinion within the Mexican high command as to what the overall strategy of the coming campaign should

be. The general staff suggested they confine their advance to the vicinity of the Gulf coast--at least as far as Goliad. Most of the supplies they required could be sufficiently transported by sea to one of the nearby ports, with the Presidio La Bahia serving as a forward logistics base. Somewhere along the way they would defeat the rebel army in a meeting engagement.²⁷

Santa Anna rejected this concept--his experience and judgment told him the plan would be too restrictive; the left flank would be dangerously exposed to enemy attack. Further dependence on sea lines of communication would leave his army vulnerable to unpredictable weather conditions and make the entire invasion susceptible to the newly organized Texas Navy of six armed schooners based at Galveston. The Mexican fleet was equally small and already taxed to its maximum threshold protecting the Mexican coast against a threatening Spanish fleet. The last such attempt had occurred six years earlier.²⁸

Santa Anna envisioned a plan with a broad front. The 1st and 2nd Divisions would comprise the main effort in the north along the Presidio-San Antonio axis, while a shaping operation in the south was undertaken by the 3rd Division via Matamoros and Goliad. General Jose Urrea was appointed commanding officer of the 3rd Division. Once the Alamo and Presidio La Bahia had been secured and converted into forward logistics bases, the entire army could fan out across the country to search and destroy rebel forces. He would commit 75 percent of all available forces to this enterprise, with minimal forces held in reserve. Flexibility was key--everything was planned to surprise the Texians in order to destroy them with overwhelming combat power.²⁹

Santa Anna marched to Saltillo, where he was joined by General Urrea and a contingent of Durango troops (Urrea was then the governor of Durango). Without discussing the proposed courses of action, Santa Anna contrived the following: Urrea was to take a body of troops to Matamoros, at which he would recruit other troops and organize his own division. His mission was to march overland up the coastal road via San Patricio, Refugio, and Goliad, with the purpose of seizing and holding these points and the Port of Copano. This would cut off the Texans at Bexar and Central Texas from their sea lines of communication. Urrea also understood these points would be converted to bases for the Mexican Army as it advanced toward the interior of Texas. Once the task of securing these strategic points was accomplished, Urrea was to continue his march eastward, via Victoria and Texana to Brazoria, for the same purpose of denying Texans access to the sea and securing additional bases for the Mexican advance.³⁰

The main effort under Santa Anna was to seize Bexar, which was to serve as the primary interior base of operations. General Gaona with the 1st Division would advance eastward with Nacogdoches as his ultimate objective, while Urrea conducted shaping operations to the south, and then proceed east to join the main body.

The three columns were to consolidate at Brazos where there would be reinforcements and additional supplies from the bases Urrea was to secure along the axis of advance. From Brazos, the three columns would advance to Sabine, and Galveston would become the base of operations. The columns were to be supplied and reinforced from the sea as they advanced. Arrangements were made for the replacements and additional supplies to be at the Ports of Copano, Velasco, and Galveston on fixed supply windows synchronized with the operation (fig. 5).³¹



Fig. 5. Map and Graphics of General Santa Anna's Campaign Execution. Reprinted from Robert F. Burke's, "A Test of Leadership: The Campaign in Texas, 1835-36," *Command* 48, no. 27 (March-April 1994): 54.

Urrea's Division was composed of approximately 1,000 infantry and 500 cavalry when its organization was completed at Matamoros. Urrea stated in his diary that he initially invaded Texas with only 350 troops, but was later reinforced with an additional 200 on 7 March 1836. His estimated strength at Goliad was a total of 550 "(320 infantry from Yucatan and 230 dragoons from Cuatla, Tampico, Durango, and Guanajuato)."³²

General Urrea, regarded as the premiere military leader in the Mexican Army, and his division of seasoned veterans would prove to be more than a match for their ill-fated opponents.

¹Brown, 128-129.

²Harbert Davenport, "Men of Goliad," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 43 (July 1939), 10.

³*Ibid.*

⁴Harbert Davenport, "Notes from an Unfinished Study of Fannin and His Men," *Davenport Collection, Texas State Library, 1936.*

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Albert A. Nofi, *The Alamo and the Texas War for Independence* (New York, New York: De Capo Press, 1994), 41-42.

⁷Gary Brown, *Volunteers in the Texas Revolution: The New Orleans Greys* (Plano, Texas: Republic of Texas Press, 1999), 16.

⁸Gary Brown, *Hesitant Martyr in the Texas Revolution* (Plano, Texas: Republic of Texas Press, 2000), 8.

⁹Claude Elliot, "Alabama and the Texas Revolution," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (January 1947): 321.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹James L. Noles, Jr., *Wheeler Plantation*, 2000; available from <http://www.wheelerplantation.org/rovers.htm>; Internet; accessed on 3 December 2001.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Elliot, 315-316.

¹⁶John C. Duval, *Early Days in Texas* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 42-43.

¹⁷Brown, *Hesitant Martyr in the Texas Revolution*, 140-172.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Clinton P. Hartmann, The Texas State Historical Society, 2001, The Handbook of Texas [Online] available from <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/FF/ffa2.html>; Internet. Accessed on 3 December 2001.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²James W. Pohl and Stephen L. Hardin, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 89, no. 3 (January, 1986): 284.

²³Ibid., 285.

²⁴Pohl and Hardin, 275 - 283.

²⁵Ibid., 277.

²⁶Carlos E. Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution* (Austin, Texas: Graphic Ideas Incorporated Publishers, 1970), 141-201.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Huson, Hobart, Sons of DeWitt Colony Texas, *From Refugio*, available from <http://www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/goliadcoletohuson.htm>; Internet; accessed on 6 September 2001.

³¹Ibid.

³²Castaneda, 213-217.

CHAPTER 3

THE ROAD TO GOLIAD

The capture of Bexar (San Antonio) culminated the series of easy victories for the Texas rebels over ill-trained and dispirited Mexican troops. There was now widespread sentiment among the volunteer forces to carry the war into Mexico--specifically to Matamoros, a strategic port in the neighboring state of Tamaulipas. So began the ill-fated Matamoros expedition.

The primary proponent of what he termed “a little military raid” into Matamoros was a Scottish physician named James Grant. Like many other agitators, Grant was not a Texian and his motives for promoting a military raid south of the Rio Grande were highly suspect from the start. Grant had moved from Europe to Louisiana and to Parras, near Matamoros, Mexico, several years earlier. At Parras, he established a lucrative medical practice and accumulated a considerable personal fortune, which included several plantations.¹

When Santa Anna came to power, he canceled all foreign land ownership in the country. The order stripped Dr. Grant of his large Mexico real estate holdings and cost him a sizable amount of his personal fortune. Grant's determination to invade Matamoros at this time had less to do with the lofty ideas of Texas independence than with a selfish personal vendetta to regain his own wealth and retaliate against Santa Anna.²

The proposed raid into Mexico gained widespread support. Many of the Texas volunteers were young adventurers anticipating excitement. They had traveled to Texas with the belief that if Texas became an independent nation or a part of the United States, they would be given monetary rewards or land grants. Many of the volunteers stole food,

supplies, and equipment from local areas ranches owned by Tejanos. The Texians did not distinguish between the local Hispanic population and considered them to be their enemy. Creed Taylor, one of Grant's officers, stated:

The volunteers, with their shameful behavior soon learned to regard the property belonging to Mexican citizens as lawful prey, and so acted accordingly. Each day, a detail was sent out to round up (Mexican-owned) beeves and fat cows for food for the garrison, and when a Mexican appeared in town with a good horse, ownership to the animal was promptly transferred to a needy American.³

The expedition had been under consideration since the middle of December, when General Houston appointed Jim Bowie to command it. However, Bowie did not receive these orders until early January 1836, and on 8 January the General Council of the Provisional Government in San Felipe gave the command to Colonel Frank W. Johnson. Johnson had been second in command at the storming of Bexar, and on 30 December he and Dr. John Grant had marched from the Alamo with 200 men. Johnson resigned (temporarily) on 6 January because of the General Council of the Provisional Government's failure to grant commissions to some of the officers of his choice. The following day, Fannin was appointed in his place, at which time Johnson repented his rash decision.⁴ Consequently, Fannin and he were placed in joint command.

The proposed Matamoros scheme brought about the collapse of the fledgling Texas government at a critical time. The council backed it vigorously, while Governor Henry Smith and General Houston were just as vehemently opposed, considering it a dangerously risky endeavor that would inevitably bring on Mexican retribution, as well as a crippling division command. The power struggle came to a head on 10 January when Smith attempted to dismiss the council, which responded by impeaching the governor and swearing in Lieutenant Governor James R. Robinson in his place.

Houston went to Goliad, where the expedition was being assembled, on 17 January with the express purpose of dissuading the troops from the campaign. He was at least partially successful, for Johnson reported to the Council that “much mischief has been done during my absence by 'disorganizers' both at Goliad and Refugio . . . and every obstacle was thrown in the way of an advance into the neighboring state.”⁵ Johnson and Grant then proceeded to San Patricio, sixty miles to the south, with one hundred men and awaited Fannin's arrival.

Fannin arrived at Copano on the twenty-eighth. Already he seemed to harbor misgiving about the fate of his command. “If all the disposable force of Texas is not called out . . . you may not be surprised to hear your officers are being compelled to make retrograde movements if they do not suffer the most disastrous defeats.”⁶ He also received a report that 2,500 Mexican troops were advancing to retake Bexar, and he passed it off as a rumor.

Fannin's opinion changed drastically on 7 February, when he received further intelligence that the Mexican Army was indeed massing on the border, and that an attack was planned on Bexar and Goliad simultaneously. “Not the least doubt should any longer be entertained . . . of the design of Santa Anna to overrun the country and expel or exterminate every white man within its borders.”⁷ He decided to fall back to Goliad and concentrate his forces there. Johnson and Grant remained in San Patricio and continued in vain to urge on the Matamoras Expedition.

After receiving Fannin's report on the thirteenth, Robinson issued command authority guidance and ordered Fannin to “occupy such points as you may in your

opinion deem most advantageous. . . . Fortify and defend Goliad and Bexar . . . give the enemy battle as he advance--a defeat of your command would prove our ruin.”⁸

Fannin was by then in a pitiable state of self-doubt and apprehension, a state he was never really able to overcome. Though given virtually independent authority, he did not want it. “I do not desire any command, and particularly that of chief,” he wrote despairingly to Robinson on the fourteenth. “I feel, I know . . . that I am incompetent. I do earnestly ask you . . . to relieve me.”⁹ Hardly the words of a brave warrior preparing to “close with and defeat the enemy!” Yet, in a dramatic and perplexing swing of mood that also marked the man, he wrote again the same day: “I am well aware, that during [Houston's] furlough, the command naturally, and or right, devolves upon me.”¹⁰

Houston had gone to hold treaty talks with the Cherokee Indian nation in late January and did not return until the last day of February; thus during that whole critical month Texas was without either a functioning government or a commander in chief. Even had Fannin been willing, it was not in his makeup to take Houston's place.

Fannin was already toying with the idea of destroying the Presidio La Bahia when he had another brainstorm. On the sixteenth he decided to move his headquarters to Bexar, “a post of danger and honor,”¹¹ and take with him as many men from Goliad as could be spared. Had he gone to reinforce the Alamo then, the course of future events might have changed dramatically. Instead of encountering the 182 defenders of the Alamo, the Mexican Army would have faced a garrison of some 500 men--perhaps enough to have made a successful defense. There, facing a life and death battle with no time to surrender to the bogeys of self-doubt and apprehension that tortured his thoughts, Fannin could quite possibly have demonstrated some degree of heroism and decisiveness.

But again he changed his mind and instead began repairing the fortifications of the Presidio against an attack he knew would come eventually. All that stood between Urrea and Goliad were the approximately one hundred disorganized troops under Johnson and Grant at San Patricio. Urrea soon neutralized the opposition.

General Urrea's division had crossed the Rio Bravo on 17 February to advance along the coast against the now defunct Matamoros expedition. General Urrea, through a network of spies, had monitored the progress of the Johnson-Grant forces and advanced to San Patricio. Johnson, with thirty-four men and approximately one hundred horses, encamped in five separate parties dispersed throughout the township. The night was extremely cold, with continuous torrential rain. Using the inclement weather to his advantage and capitalizing on the element of surprise, Urrea surprised the Texians and killed or captured the majority of the men including Grant. Johnson and four others managed to escape. Plácido Benavides, one of the escapees, reported the event to Fannin on 2 March. Fannin took no direct action and continued to reinforce the Presidio La Bahia, now christened Fort Defiance.

He reported to Governor Robinson that the fortifications would be completed by 3 March.¹² Then the same old ambivalence surfaced once more. With Houston still absent, “neither myself nor army have received orders as to who should assume command. It is my right, and, in many respects I have done so.”¹³ Yet he later wrote, “I am not desirous of retaining the present, or receiving any other appointment in the army. . . . I am a better judge of my military abilities than others, and if I am qualified to command an Army, I have not found it out.”¹⁴

But just as he seemed resigned to await the enemy, another message arrived from Bexar. Sent on 23 February, it was signed by both Travis and Bowie.

We have removed all the men to the Alamo where we make such resistance as is due our honor, and that of our country, until we get assistance from you, which we expect you to forward immediately. . . . We deem it unnecessary to repeat to a brave officer who knows his duty, that we call on him for assistance.¹⁵

Their plea, along with the veiled, but unmistakable criticism in which it was couched, at last goaded Fannin into action. Leaving approximately one hundred men to defend the vast expanse of the fort, whose walls enclosed a 3 1/2-acre square, he prepared to march on the twenty-sixth with 320 men and four cannon. "I am well aware that my present movement to Bexar is anything but a military one--the appeal of Colonels Travis and Bowie cannot, however, pass unnoticed. . . . Much must be risked to relieve the besieger."¹⁶ However, his own deep sense of foreboding seemed to have infected his men as well, one of whom wrote: "I frankly confess that without the interposition of providence we cannot rationally anticipate any other result to our Quixotic expedition than total defeat."¹⁷

Weighted with misgivings, the expedition departed on the morning of the twenty-sixth. Westover's company provided a rear detachment at Presidio La Bahia. "Rear-D" Command would be brief, for the task force advanced all of 200 meters before one of the wagons broke down. After struggling across the river with the artillery, the men camped for the night. The next morning Fannin's officers requested a "Council of War," which he quickly granted. The expedition, it was decided, was sheer madness and doomed to failure. Fannin concurred. "It was by them unanimously determined . . . to return to this post and complete the fortifications,"¹⁸ wrote Fannin, obviously relieved that the decision

had been taken out of his hands. John White Bower brought news that Urrea was rapidly advancing on Goliad at the head of a large Mexican force. Bower's information also influence Fannin's decision making and his plans to abandon relief of the Alamo.¹⁹

Perhaps no other action committed by Fannin is more reviled than this aborted march, which sealed once and for all the Alamo's fate. And yet it was one of the few decisions he made that may have in fact been strategically sound. Santa Anna had received reports that Fannin's march was underway, and sent cavalry and troops to intercept them.²⁰ On foot as they were, it was likely they would have been cut to pieces well before they ever reached the Alamo. The time for Fannin to have gone to the aid of Bexar was before the arrival of the Mexican Army.

Once back in Fort Defiance, Fannin took heart once again. Believing that he could maintain himself against any force, he wrote: "I will never give up the ship, while there is a pea in the ditch. If I am whipped it will be well done."²¹ By 1 March the fortifications were nearly complete. "I am pretty well prepared to make battle,"²² Fannin reported to Robinson. But clearly he did not relish the idea, for he urged the governor to allow him to retreat. Once again his paralyzing fear of command surfaced: "I cannot be considered acting commander, as I have never received orders to that effect . . . I am desirous to be removed from the lists of officers."²³ Yet such was his state of mental flux at the time that he once again toyed with idea of relieving the Alamo.²⁴ Hearing (rumor) that a relief force of 270 men was on its way to Bexar, Fannin planned to send out 200 of his own troops to join them at Gonzales. "I would risk life and all for our brave men at the Alamo,"²⁵ he wrote. In any event, this plan did not materialize.

On 27 February Johnson and forty of his men were surprised by Urrea's Cavalry at San Patricio; only Johnson and three of his men escaped alive. Grant's fate was sealed five days later when his small company was ambushed at Aqua Dulce Creek, and all except two killed. The axis of advance to Goliad was now wide open, but the cautious Urrea lingered in San Patricio for more than a week, preparing his forces for what he believed would be the bloody task of attacking Fort Defiance.²⁶

At Goliad, Fannin and his men waited as well, expecting an attack from the enemy. Clearly the troop's morale, already eroded by their commander's continual wavering, was fast collapsing. "The restraints of discipline . . . produced discontent and murmurs and a loss of confidence in their commander,"²⁷ wrote Dr. J. H. Barnard, one of the post's surgeons. "Fannin was not slow to perceive the feeling coming over the men, and it caused a corresponding depression of his mind."²⁸

News of the Alamo's imminent collapse reached Fannin and his restive dispirited troops on 8 March. It had actually fallen on the sixth of March. General Houston confirmed the fact when he arrived in Gonzales on the eleventh. He also sent orders to Fannin to destroy Fort Defiance and fall back to Guadeloupe Victoria with his command.²⁹ One would have expected Fannin, who had been agitating for just such a retrograde movement for nearly a month, to have eagerly and immediately obeyed the order. But, inconsistent to the last, he did not.

On the tenth Fannin dispatched a task force under Captain Amon B. King to rescue the family of an Americano rancher unable to escape from Refugio and Urrea's advance. It should be noted that General Houston had issued a warning six weeks prior against dispatching small parties when the Mexican Army was so close. This was

Fannin's second incident. One week earlier, he ordered a contingent from Shackelford's Red Rover's to a local ranch to neutralize a suspected "nest of spies."³⁰ King was sent directly into Urrea's, arguably *known*, path.

Once there, King was attacked by a Mexican force and withdrew into a mission. Fannin compounded his blunder by dispatching Lieutenant Colonel William Ward with 120 men to "rescue the rescuers" on the twelfth. After Houston's order arrived, Fannin decided to postpone his withdrawal until King and Ward returned. For five days no word of their fate came, and it was not until the seventeenth that he received news of yet another debacle from a courier, McDonald Frazier.³¹

Ward had succeeded in driving off the Mexicans. But instead of returning to Goliad immediately, King took it upon himself to lead a "punishment raid" on nearby Mexican rancheros. Ward remained at Refugio waiting for him to return, when on 14 March Urrea's main body suddenly arrived and contained Ward in the mission. He and his men held the Mexicans off until nightfall and then managed to slip through Mexican lines and escape up the coast toward Victoria. Meanwhile King's force was surrounded and captured. Urrea ordered them to be executed and then turned at last toward Goliad.³²

Fannin was in a quandary. Aware of the necessity for rapid withdrawal, he was anxious to obey Houston's orders. He could not, however, bring himself to abandon the men under King and Ward. They should have returned, but Fannin had heard nothing and feared the worst. He could send additional reinforcements to Refugio, but such action would further delay the withdrawal and run the risk of having his various contingents swallowed up piecemeal. King had, furthermore, taken most of the wagons and teams to transport civilians, leaving Fannin without adequate transportation.

Ward sent James Humphries to Goliad to recommend that Fannin retreat to Victoria to effect a linkup with the remainder of his task force who, by this time, had been decisively engaged by Urrea's forces. Volunteers were left with wounded soldiers and Anglo families. Ward left Refugio on 14 March under the cover of darkness and traveled through woods and swamps to avoid pursuit by the Mexican Cavalry. King's company also tried to escape during the night, but was overtaken the following day. The remainder of Ward's Battalion and King's company was executed. The German-born Lieutenant Colonel Holzinger of the Mexican Army spared two German soldiers, Private Lewis T. Ayers, and civilian families.³³

Fannin spent 15 and 16 March waiting for Ward's return. He dispatched couriers to Ward, but most were captured. General Urrea learned the details of the Goliad commander's plans and schemed accordingly. Finally, on the evening of 17 March, Hugh McDonald Frazer successfully negotiated the Mexican gauntlet and reported the news of Ward and King's defeat. Instead of marching at once, Fannin spent 18 March taking the "necessary measures for retreat in accordance with the resolution of the officers in council."³⁴ Later that day, a Mexican advance guard was sighted to the west of the fort. A cavalry troop of consisting of thirty-one horsemen under Captain Albert C. Horton, which had been sent by Houston to facilitate the withdrawal, was dispatched by Fannin to drive them off. Volunteer Abel Morgan observed: "When our men would turn to come back the Mexican would pursue them until they would get within gunshot or our footmen, when they would turn and our men would pursue again. They kept alternately chasing and being chased until dusk when the Mexicans left."³⁵ Fannin, perhaps thinking these advance units were the entire Mexican force, only succeeded in tiring his horses in

an attempt to drive them off. Horton, with the aid of the Red Rovers and an artillery barrage, was successful in spoiling the Mexican reconnaissance effort, but reported the approach of Mexican reinforcements estimated at 1,500 soldiers.

Upon receipt of the reports, Fannin called his officers for a “council of war.” The unanimous opinion was in favor of an immediate retreat, and he directed that the retreat should begin early the next morning. Fannin became apprehensive that the enemy would attack that night, and cannons which had been buried were exhumed and remounted in preparation for the attack. The Texians continued to prepare throughout the night for their dawn evacuation. Horton's Cavalry were the last reinforcements the Goliad commander received. The Garrison totaled 330 men, excluding King's and Ward's commands.

Fannin had hoped to withdraw under the cover of darkness, but Horton reported the “night too murky for a proper march.” Departure was further postponed and once again delayed, expecting an assault on the fort that night. During this delay, the oxen, which were hitched and prepared for movement, were not fed or watered.³⁶

Private Abel Morgan, of Westover's Company, who was assigned sentry duty during the night recalled,

Colonel Fannin asked me what I thought about retreating and leaving the fort. I told him that my opinion was that it was too late; for I made no doubt from what we had seen that we were entirely surrounded by the enemy; and that we had something like six weeks provisions and men enough to keep the enemy from breaking in for some time, as we had then about 360 men. Colonel Fannin seemed to have his mind unsettled about it. Captain Westover agreed with me, and said if we had left some three or four days before, he thought we might have escaped; but he made no doubt that we were surrounded now.³⁷

But the Mexicans did not appear, and on the morning of the nineteenth, the evacuation from Fort Defiance finally began. Typical of volunteer army, the men leisurely prepared and ate breakfast. Eating, packing supplies, and spiking cannon took up so much of the morning that by the time they actually departed, the fog had lifted. There were 270 men, along with nine cannons, ammunition, and baggage wagons--all drawn by oxen. Suitably enough, a dense fog shrouded the scene.

Provisions were burned, unit basic loads were not accounted for, and many of the cannons were spiked. Fannin still insisted on bringing nine cumbersome artillery cannons and about 1,000 spare muskets. The carts were heavily loaded and the hungry oxen were temperamental. Urrea, expecting to lay siege to the Presidio La Bahia, was unaware of Fannin's departure until two hours later. Precious time was lost as a cart broke down. The largest artillery piece fell into the San Antonio River and required an hour's labor to retrieve (see figs. 6 and 7). Even so, the retreat might have been accomplished had Fannin listened to the urgings of Duval, Westover, and Shackelford and pushed his march to the shelter of the woods bordering Coleta Creek. They protested the administrative pause, arguing that the column should not rest until reaching the protection of the Coleta Creek timber. Instead, Fannin halted the column to rest the men and graze the hungry oxen on the broad prairie between Manahulla and Coleta Creeks, thus losing another precious hour. Had this halt been made in the Coleta timberline, water, forage for the teams, a defensible position, and superior marksmanship would have multiplied Texian strength.



Fig. 6. Replica of 18th Century 9-Pound Cannon. Precious time was lost when an artillery piece, similar to the replica in Fig. 6, fell into the San Antonio River. Photographs were taken by the author at Goliad, Texas, 19 December 2001.



Fig. 7. San Antonio River Crossing Site. The crossing site used by Fannin during the evacuation from Presidio La Bahia. The ruts from the “heavily loaded” carts are faint, but still visible. Photographs were taken by the author at Goliad, Texas, 19 December 2001.

The Texans resumed the march after the rest halt before another cart broke down. Its contents had to be transferred to another wagon. A total of two hours were spent transporting the trains across the San Antonio River and halting the column.

Fannin and many of his men, contemptuous of Mexican military abilities, did not believe the enemy would pursue them. Urrea, skillfully stalking his foe, mistook Fannin's unexplained delay for an intention to stand and fight at Goliad and was not immediately prepared to intercept him; thus, he allowed the Texans at least a two-hour lead, which Fannin unfortunately lost crossing the San Antonio River and grazing the oxen. Earlier that morning he had sent out Horton's cavalry to reconnoiter their route, and assigned four horsemen as a rear guard to warn him of a Mexican advance.³⁸

These four were caught entirely unaware when, at approximately 1400, a large force of Mexican Cavalry appeared through the fog. Three of Horton's scouts galloped past the surprised Texans to join Horton's cavalry and safety beyond, while the fourth, Herman Ehrenberg, a young German immigrant, joined Fannin and his men. The fog began to lift and disclosed the approach of the Mexicans. Ehrenberg and others reported sighting a "long dark streak,"³⁹ which would later prove to be a column of Urrea's cavalry. The Texians began to move off toward Coleta Creek and its protective timber some three miles away. Mexican officers later reported the formation's peculiar lack of a sense of urgency when pursued by the enemy's cavalry.

After proceeding one mile, their ammunition wagon broke down. The Mexican commander ordered his cavalry to halt Fannin's advance toward the protective timber and they moved ahead of the Texians in order to cut off their retrograde. By now infantry units were closing from the rear. Ehrenberg later wrote that the Texians almost

immediately began discarding supplies, then the carts themselves, in an effort to “hurry up the pace of the march.” After eight miles, the oxen became increasingly unruly and difficult to handle--to the point of refusing to continue. Fannin made the decision to stop and make a stand where he was, in a depression on the prairie covered with high grass that obstructed clear fields of fire, rather than pushing on to the safety of the creek.⁴⁰ This pivotal decision would set the stage for the tragic series of events that would befall Fannin and his men at Coleto Creek.

¹Bruce Dettman, "Prisoners Shown No Mercy," *Wild West* 4, no. 4, (June 1990): 28.

²*Ibid.*, 30.

³James T. DeShields, *Tall Men With Long Rifles* (San Antonio, Texas: Naylor Company, 1935), 83-84.

⁴Robert J. Scott, *After the Alamo* (Plano, Texas: Republic of Texas Press), 50-55.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Dettman, 28.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸Wallace L. McKeehan, Archival Communications Goliad February-March 1836, Official Correspondence, *Sons of DeWitt Colony Texas*, available from <http://www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/goliadofficial.htm>, Internet; accessed on 5 December 2001.

⁹Dettman, 29.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²McKeehan, 10.

¹³Dettman, 29.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵McKeehan, 13.

¹⁶Dettman, 30.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸McKeehan, 14-15.

¹⁹John White Bower, Handbook of Texas Online: available from <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/print/BB/fbo42.html>; Internet; accessed on 1 September 2001.

²⁰Castaneda, 14, 230.

²¹McKeehan, 15.

²²Ibid.

²³Dettman, 31.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Castaneda, 224-230.

²⁷Dettman, 31.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹McKeehan, 18.

³⁰Dettman, 31.

³¹Ibid.

³²Castaneda, 224-230.

³³Abel Morgan, "Abel Morgan and His account of the Battle of Goliad," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 100, no. 2 (July 1939): 210-211.

³⁴Stephen L. Hardin, *Texian Iliad: A Military History of the Texas Revolution* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1989), 165.

³⁵Ibid, 166.

³⁶Ibid, 165-167.

³⁷Abel Morgan, Account, <http://www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/goliaddiverse.htm>; Internet; accessed on 6 September 2001, 2-4.

³⁸Scott, 174-178.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

THE BATTLE OF COLETO CREEK AND CAPITULATION: A LEADER'S DEFINING MOMENT

The Battle of Coleto Creek cannot properly be considered as isolated from the series of errors and misfortunes that preceded it--errors for which the commander James W. Fannin Jr. was ultimately responsible. The most exasperating decision confronting Fannin was whether to abandon Goliad after having fortified it and, if so, when. He had already been warned of General Urrea's advancing army following the defeat of Johnson and Grant at San Patricio. Almost simultaneously, he received word that the Alamo had fallen. Still, he continued to fortify Fort Defiance and awaited orders from superiors to abandon the site, knowing also that a retreat would not be well received by his men, who were eager to confront the Mexicans.¹

More consequential to the Battle of Coleto Creek was Fannin's dispatching King's men and subsequently Ward and the Georgia Battalion to Refugio, a move primarily induced by the activities of Urrea's advance guard. Not only did the decision to send Ward and King into Urrea's known path dangerously divide the Goliad garrison, thus reducing overall strength by 150, but the action became the primary reason Fannin waited so long to abandon Goliad. He refused to do so until he learned of King's and Ward's fates, even after he received General Houston's order to fall back to Victoria.

Since King had taken the Goliad garrison's wagons and teams with him to Refugio, Fannin further delayed his withdrawal, awaiting Horton's arrival. In addition to a cavalry troop, Horton provided an additional twenty carts and yokes of oxen.²

Further complicating matters was the capture of virtually all of Fannin's couriers sent to find King and Ward. Urrea learned the details of the Goliad commander's plans and schemed accordingly.³

Surrounded on the prairie, without food and water, Fannin's inexperienced command fought the seasoned Mexican veterans throughout the afternoon of 19 March. The fighting began in the early afternoon and lasted until dark. Mexican forces numbered approximately 500 in the beginning of the battle, but reinforcements arriving throughout the day brought their total to approximately 1,000 by nightfall, giving the Mexicans a five-to-one advantage.⁴

Initially, Fannin set up a skirmish line with supporting artillery while the column attempted to reach Coleta Creek, some two miles east of their position. With the absence of natural cover and concealment, he subsequently ordered his men into a hollow square formation and deployed his cannon. The cannon shots summoned Horton's cavalry, but they found that the overwhelming numbers of Urrea's cavalry denied their access to the main column. Unable to reach the Texians, they were believed enroute to Victoria for reinforcements. At this juncture, the Mexicans were uncontested and controlled the surrounding countryside including access to the crucial water supply of the San Antonio River.⁵

Fannin ordered his formation positioned three ranks deep behind what little barricade could be erected--mainly supply carts and equipment. The Alabama Red Rovers and Pettus' Company of San Antonio Greys formed the front line, and the Mobile Greys were stationed on the right flank. Westover's troops formed the left flank, while Duval's Mustangs deployed to the rear of the square. The nine artillery pieces were

positioned at each corner and were initially manned by Polish artillerymen under the command of Francis Petrussequeiz. One of the disabled wagons was placed in the center and used as an aid station (see fig. 8).⁶

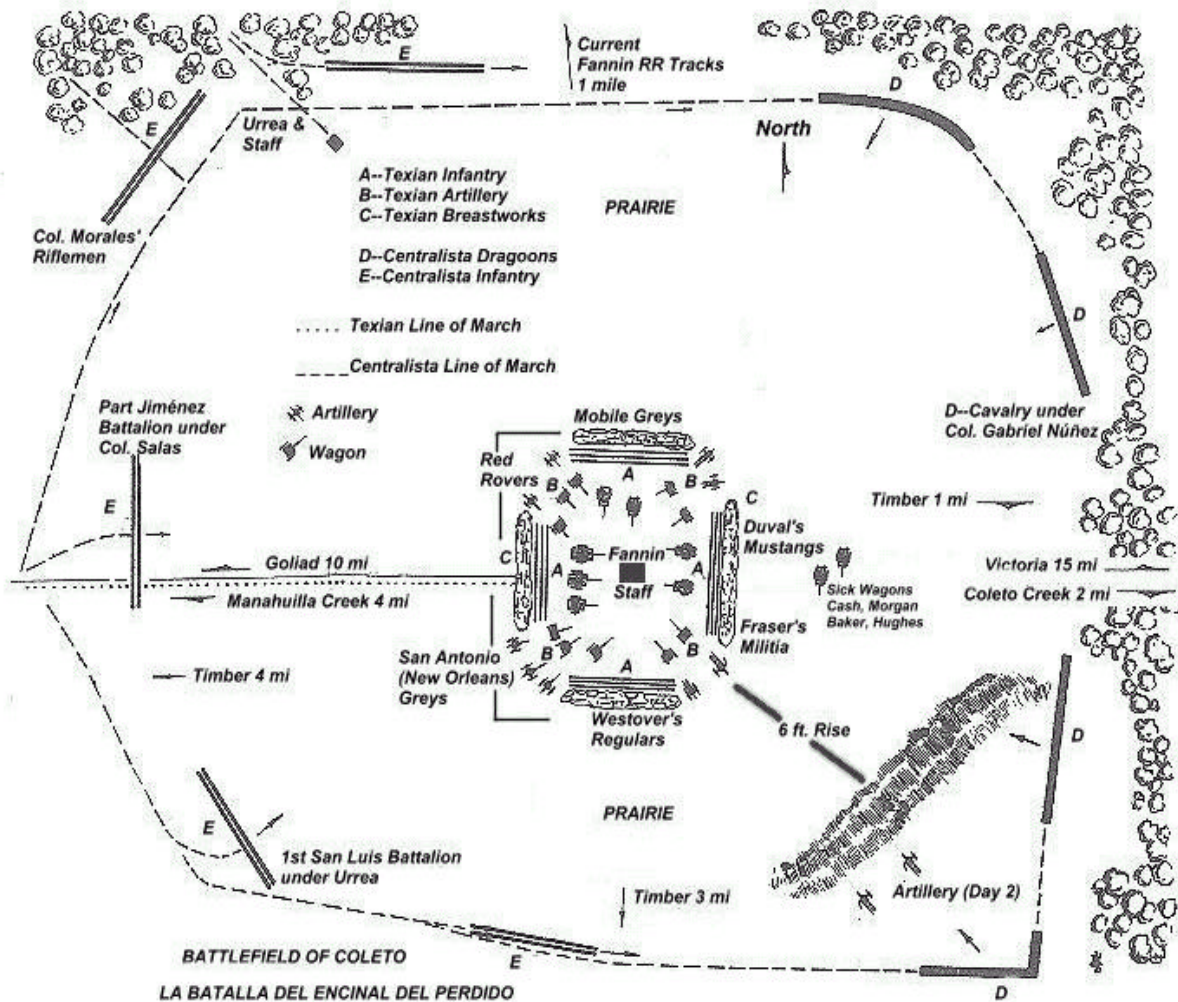


Fig. 8. Fannin's "Hollow Square" Formation at Coletto Creek. Fannin's force employs this defensive formation at Coletto Creek on 19 March 1836. Reprinted from Kathryn Stoner O'Connor's, *Presidio La Bahia, 1721-1846* (Austin, Texas: Wexford Publishing, 2001), 122.

Ironically, what led to the Texians envelopment and isolation--the overloaded carts and increasing numbers of dead draft animals, actually gave them an improvised tactical advantage. The wagons had been packed with additional weapons and black powder ammunition. There definitely was not a shortage of rifles. Some survivor accounts report as many as three weapons issued to each man on the perimeter. Additionally, the nine brass cannons provided fires while the Mexican forces had not yet transported their artillery pieces--early on, a significant tactical advantage. The Texian soldiers made effective use of their bayonets, vast arsenal of muskets, and nine cannons. The square remained unbroken once it was formed.

The positioning of artillery proved paramount. While deploying cannon directly to the front often suppressed frontal attacks, corner positioning facilitated “swinging” the barrels as necessary during the fight allowing greater flexibility in target selection and acquisition. The 1830’s tactics professed that occupying the high ground provided a tactically significant advantage over the opposing force; however, *round shot* or *iron ball* proved most lethal when fired at a level trajectory--especially at close range. The shot would pierce the ranks of charging soldiers and inflict numerous casualties while evoking utter panic. After penetrating the lead echelons, the shot would then bounce across the ground and continue dismembering personnel.⁷

Despite the Texians initial superiority, the Mexicans would prove decisive through attrition, positional advantage (superior maneuver), and the echelonment of reinforcing combat power. When the Mexican soldiers advanced on the hollow square formation, Fannin assumed a command position on the right flank.⁸

The Mexican assault began as an attack on all four sides of the formation. As the advance continued, Fannin directed strict fire control measures and effected devastating counterattacks resulting in heavy Mexican casualties. Urrea's riflemen, using the grass for concealment, began sniping into the Texian square--targeting the artillerymen and draft animals. Urrea regrouped his four companies and attempted to retrieve the numerous wounded while signaling a second assault. The Texians again repelled the attack by rotating their numerous weapons against the Mexican ranks.⁹ An unidentified source later stated:

Their front ranks were so suddenly swept off as almost to form a breastwork sufficient in itself to shield our friends from their assaults. The scene was now dreadful to behold; killed and maimed men and horses were strewn over the plain, the wounded were rending the air with their distressing moans, while a great number of horses without riders were rushing to and from back upon the enemy's lines, increasing the confusion among them: they thus became so entangled, the one with the other, that their retreat resembled the headlong flight of a herd of buffaloes, rather than the retreat of a well-drilled regular army as they were.¹⁰

Ehrenberg's description of the scene:

Frightened by the noise, the horses of the enemy plunged and kicked wildly. Many of the Mexicans were thrown off their saddles, and their riderless horses galloped aimlessly across the field, while wounded men and beasts lying prostrate in the dust were trampled upon by the advancing or retreating cavalry squadrons.¹¹

This attack and counterattack scenario continued throughout the afternoon. As the afternoon wore on, the Texians also began to accumulate considerable casualties. In the final hour of daylight, Urrea brought up additional reinforcements to snipe at the Texians from the high vegetation surrounding their position. This tactic proved effective and the sharpshooters wounded over fifty Texians before darkness. The Texians lost their most significant combat multiplier when their artillery became nonmission capable. Without

water for swabbing, the barrels became congested with hazardous residue. Also compounding the problem with the cannon was the fact that by late afternoon, Petrusseweiz and the Polish cannoneers had all been targeted and killed by the Mexican sharpshooters, and the artillery pieces were being manned by substitutes with little to no training.¹²

With darkness, the Texian cannon were silenced and the Mexican sharpshooters withdrew out of range to conceal their rifle muzzle flashes. Mexican battle losses were significant: 140 wounded and at least 50 killed in action.¹³ Some estimates ranged as high as 400 Mexicans killed and wounded. Dr. Joseph Barnard reported Texian casualties as sixty wounded and seven killed in action. Among the casualties was Colonel Fannin who was wounded three times. A gunshot to the left thigh proximal to his hip had the most debilitating effect.¹⁴

Private Abel Morgan reported:

After the sundown the Mexicans quit firing, retired a distance of about a mile, and struck camp in the edge of the timber. We went to work ditching. Every animal we had was killed or wounded. . . . [W]e took the dead mules and horses, and laid [them] round and made breast works. Even our knapsacks were piled on to help, and some trunks. We soon had our square fortified and then we look to our dead and wounded.¹⁵

Throughout the night, the eerie cries and moans of the wounded on both sides could be heard. The lack of water and inability to light fires made treating the wounded nearly impossible; the situation worsened by cold rainstorms. The Mexicans did not evacuate their dead and wounded for fear of Texian sniper fire while using torches to find them. The Texians were without water. During the fighting, Mexicans had also concentrated their fires on the animals; thus, Fannin had no means to evacuate the

wounded. To further demoralize the Texian's will and assault them with psychological operations, Urrea ordered his buglers to intermittently signal false attacks. The fatigued Texians were denied sleep throughout the night. Mexican detachments were posted at three points around the hollow square to prevent escape (see fig. 9).¹⁶



Fig. 9. Structure Representing Center of Mass of Colonel Fannin's Hollow Square Formation. The structure in the center of the photograph represents center mass of Colonel Fannin's "hollow square" formation where the Texians made their infamous last stand against Urrea's forces. Photograph taken by the author at Fannin Battleground, State Parks and Recreation Department, Coletto Creek, Texas, 18 December 2001.

The Mexican perimeter was not completely intact, and many of the Texians were strongly in favor of escaping under the cover of darkness. The decision to remain and not abandoned the wounded was ultimately made by Fannin and his officers in one of the

impromptu “election councils.” The New Orleans Greys became particularly vocal in their opposition to the decision, but in the end opted to remain with the group.¹⁷ John C. Duval of the Kentucky Mustangs noted at least one account of desertion: “Sometime during the night it was ascertained that three of our men had deserted, and shortly afterwards as a volley of musketry was heard between us and the timber on the Coleta, they were no doubt discovered and shot by the Mexican patrol.”¹⁸

In the Mexican ranks, General Urrea continued to dispatch his cavalry to control and secure the countryside in order to neutralize Horton. During the night he received some artillery pieces and a considerable number of reinforcements. Urrea made the arrival of the cannon at dawn the following day blatantly obvious.¹⁹

Capitulation

The hopelessness of the Texian circumstances was apparent with the sunrise. Against effective cannon fire, the carcasses and abandoned wagons sparsely positioned along the Texian perimeter would provide a sorry defense. Inside their formation, the Texians were already discussing acceptable terms of surrender.

Daylight at last appeared, and before the sun had risen we saw that the Mexican forces were all in motion. . . . [We] soon discovered that they had been heavily reinforced during the night. They moved down upon us in four division, and when within five or six hundred yards, they unlimbered their field pieces and opened fire upon us.²⁰

Many speculated the fate of Horton and his men. Were they successful in garnering reinforcements from Victoria or were they killed during the night by Urrea's cavalry?

Horton and his men had proceeded east to secure the Coleta crossing before the fighting began. Having escaped after attempting to break through Mexican lines, they returned to the edge of the timber and eventually withdrew to Victoria. Horton could see

no useful purpose in adding his men to the “general sacrifice”--a decision that would haunt him throughout the rest of his life. His comrades expected him to bring reinforcements. Horton found Victoria, virtually deserted, and he proceeded to Gonzales without effecting a linkup with Ward.

Following a Mexican artillery barrage, Fannin was convinced that making a stand would be futile. He conferred with his officers, and the majority favored negotiations for “honorable” terms of surrender. Fannin ordered a white flag hoisted, and the Mexicans immediately ceased fire and dispatched three officers including the English-speaking German colonel of artillery Juan Holzinger.²¹

Survivor reports later indicated much confusion about the final conditions of surrender. When the Mexican and Texian commissioners failed to immediately agree on surrender terms, Urrea, allegedly, shortened the conference by conferring directly with Fannin and proposed written terms. Fannin drafted a document that guaranteed the Texians would be considered prisoners of war, that their wounded would receive medical care, and that all prisoners would be paroled back to the United States. He apparently presented the document to General Urrea through Holzinger only to have the Mexican commander outright reject it and insisted that the Texians surrender “unconditionally.” Discussions were conducted in English, Spanish, and German. The final documents were written in both Spanish and English. It is significant that the Spanish version of the document is the version the Mexicans regarded as “official.” The final signed copy appears to be consistent and clear:

Art.1st. The Mexican troops having placed their artillery at a distance of one hundred and seventy paces and having opened fire, we raised a white flag at once. Colonel Juan Morales Mariano Salas came in company with Lieutenant

Colonel Juan Jose Holzinger of the Engineers, and we proposed to them to surrender ourselves at discretion, to which they agreed.

Art. 2nd. That the wounded and their commander Fannin should be treated with all consideration possible, since we propose to surrender all our arms.

Art. 3rd. All the detachment shall be treated as prisoners of war and placed at the disposal of the Supreme Government.

Camp on the Coleta between Guadalupe and La Bahia, March 20, 1836.

B.C. WALLACE, Major
J.M. CHADWICK
J.W. FANNIN, Commander

[Added by Urrea]: When the white flag was raised by the enemy, I ordered their leader to be informed that I could have no other agreement than that they should surrender at Discretion, without any other condition, and this was agreed to by the persons stated above; the other petitions, which the subscribers of this surrender make will not be granted. I told them this, and they agreed to it, for I must not, nor can I, grant anything else.²²

Given the fact that Fannin's officers insisted that the "honorable" surrender: (1) guarantee their treatment as prisoners of war, (2) provide the wounded adequate medical care, and (3) the parole of the Texians to the United States, Fannin himself may have accepted the terms of surrender based upon Urrea's assurance that he would recommend approval of those terms to Santa Anna and was confident in obtaining his approval within eight days. The Texians, therefore, surrendered to the Mexican Army, thinking they would be treated as prisoners of war and paroled to the United States. Dr. Barnard later recorded:

After some parley a capitulation with General Urrea was agreed upon, the terms of which were that we should lay down our arms and surrender ourselves as prisoners of war; that we should be treated as such, according to the usage of civilized nations. That our wounded men should be taken back to Goliad and properly attended to and that all private property should be respected.

These were the terms that Col. Fannin distinctly told his men on his return, had been agreed upon, and which was confirmed by Major

Wallace and Captain Dusangue, the interpreter.

We were told that the articles of capitulation were reduced to writing and signed by the commander of each side and one or two of their principal officers; that the writings were in duplicate, and each commander retained a copy.

We were also told, though I cannot vouch for the authority, that as soon as possible we should be sent to New Orleans under parole not to serve any more against Mexico during the war in Texas; but it seemed to be confirmed by an observation of the Mexican Colonel Holzinger, who was to superintend the receiving of our arms.²³

Fannin's intentions and his actions in representing the Texians will probably never be established beyond a doubt, but it must also be remembered that he was obligated to act in the best immediate interests of his many wounded personnel. Urrea could not ratify such an agreement--he was bound by Santa Anna's orders and congressional decree to accept no terms other than unconditional surrender. He made it clear to Fannin in person that he could only offer to intercede on the Texian's behalf with Santa Anna. The extant document of capitulation, signed by Wallace, Chadwick, and Fannin shows that the Texian commander surrendered his men subject to the disposition of the supreme government of Mexico. Perhaps Fannin did not clearly define this condition with his officers.

The decision to surrender had not been unanimous, and although the Texians eventually complied, there was initial resistance that bordered on insubordination and threatened the safety of the group inside the square. Much of that resistance came from members of the Alabama Red Rovers and the New Orleans Greys. Ultimately, the Texians delivered their arms to the Mexicans.²⁴

The surrender at Coleto Creek marked the beginning of the end for Colonel Fannin and his men. Herman Ehrenberg, who was slightly wounded in the battle,

appropriately conveyed the somber mood of the defeated Texians, “Inwardly deeply humiliated, which showed itself on our faces, we walked up and down in our camp, casting angry looks at Fannin and the others that had voted for the capitulation. Some sat lost in thought with eyes fixed stark on the ground and envied those who had died during the battle.”²⁵

The first hint that something was terribly wrong for the captured Texians occurred when the Mexicans ordered captured medical personnel to treat the Mexican wounded before attending to Texians. The wounded Mexicans were so numerous that the physicians became overwhelmed and unable to attend Texian casualties. During this period, many Texian casualties were denied medical care and water. Fannin was among this group--isolated from his men while he lay wounded on the Coleto Creek battleground.²⁶

Approximately 230 uninjured and ambulatory casualties were marched back to Goliad and deposited in the Chapel of Nuestra Senora de Loreto (Our Lady of Loreto). The wounded (nonambulatory) Texians, approximately sixty including physicians and physicians assistants, were carted to Goliad over the next two days. The century old dirt-floored chapel was quite small for its improvised purpose of hospital ward and prison cell. Fannin was later sequestered and billeted in one of the chapel's storage rooms. Personnel categorized as “uninjured” were also secured in the west wing of the Presidio La Bahia quadrangle. The prisoners were denied food, water, and medical attention until the morning of the twenty-first when they were given parcels of raw beef. Some of the men attempted to burn the Stations of the Cross in order to cook the meat, an act their captors later called “barbaric,” while most ate it raw. Conditions inside the chapel

became stifling from body wastes and other odors, while the wounded continued to suffer from their festering wounds and lack of treatment.²⁷ Ehrenberg gave a graphic description of the ordeal,

The prisoners were literally stuffed, as we stood so close man to man that was possible at the highest for only one-fourth to even sit down. . . . [T]he heat was much greater and more suffocating than the night before. Many slept while sanding as the bodies pressed so close against one another made it impossible to fall over. Some of the smaller ones, who were fortunate enough to cower on the floor, could rest at least for a short time. . . . [W]e clamored for food and demanded to see the commanding officer.²⁸

The following morning, small rations of water were distributed among the ranks. Wounded Texians continued to arrive from the battlefield throughout the day, increasing the already overcrowded population within the chapel (figs. 10 and 11). Among the new arrivals was Colonel Fannin. While the defeated Texians came to grips with their new status as detainees, General Urrea continued the campaign to the east.

Urrea continued his advance to Victoria immediately following the capitulation, leaving Colonel Nicholas de la Portilla in command of Goliad. Urrea believed reinforcements would come from Victoria, based on captured articles from Fannin. He wrote Santa Anna from Victoria with a situation report summarizing the events leading to La Batalla Del Encinal Del Perdido or the Battle of Coleto Creek and the capitulation. In this correspondence, he indicated that Fannin and his men were “prisoners of war” and at the disposal of the supreme Mexican government. He did, in fact, recommend clemency, but the message did not contain information referencing the terms of surrender drafted earlier by the leadership of the both sides.²⁹



Fig. 10. Exterior View--Chapel of Nuestra Senora de Loreto (Our Lady of Loreto). To this day, weekly mass is conducted at the Chapel of Nuestra Senora de Loreto (Our Lady of Loreto). The photo was taken by the author at Presido La Bahia, Goliad, Texas, 18 December 2001.



Fig. 11. Interior View--Chapel of Nuestra Senora de Loreto (Our Lady of Loreto). The century old dirt-floored chapel was quite small for its improvised purpose of hospital ward and prison cell for over 300 captured Texans. The photo was taken by the author at Presido La Bahia, Goliad, Texas, 18 December 2001.

On 22 March, Urrea's cavalry enveloped and captured Lieutenant Colonel Ward and his command near Dimmitt's Landing. Ward was forced to surrender under the same conditions and terms accorded Fannin. Ward and eighty-five of his men (remnants of the Georgia Battalion) were added to the Goliad prisoners three days later.³⁰

On 24 March, Lieutenant Colonel Holzinger escorted Fannin, despite his severe wound, and two members of his staff to Copano. Their purpose was to determine the availability of ships and to arrange transportation of the prisoners to New Orleans. The party returned on Saturday, 26 March, unsuccessful in securing sea transportation. Fannin remained optimistic that subsequent attempts to negotiate and contract transportation would be accomplished once parole was effected. The prisoners, apparently, shared his optimism.³¹ Later the same day, Portilla received Santa Anna's reply to Urrea's clemency letter from a courier.

I am informed that there have been sent to you by General Urrea, two hundred and thirty-four prisoners, taken in the action of Encinal del Perdido on the 19th and 20th of the present month; and, as the supreme government has ordered that all foreigners taken with arms in their hands, making war upon the nation, shall be treated as "pirates." . . . I have been surprised . . . that this has not been fully complied! I therefore order that you should give immediate effect to the said ordinance in respect to all those foreigners, who have yielded to the force of arms, having had the audacity to come and insult the Republic, to devastate with fire and sword, as has been the case in Goliad. . . . I trust that, in reply to this, you will inform me that public vengeance has been satisfied. I transcribe the decree of the said government for your guidance [23 March 1836, A.L. Santa Anna].³²

Approximately two hours later, Portilla received another written directive--this time from Urrea, which stipulated the prisoners were to be spared. "Portilla suffered an unquiet night weighing these conflicting orders."³³ He concluded in compliance with the definitive orders of His Excellency the General-in-Chief.

I received direct, at four o'clock tomorrow morning the prisoners sent by you to this fortress will be shot.

J.N. de Portilla. Goliad, March 26, 1836.³³³⁴

Palm Sunday Massacre

The Sunday morning following the Battle of Coleto Creek dawned warm and muggy under overcast skies. While James Fannin remained isolated in the chapel, his men were summoned early to the courtyard by Mexican soldiers adorned in full parade regalia. The prisoners held little suspicion of their fate--rumors that they were mustered to gather wood or of a ship awaiting them at Copano circulated throughout the ranks with much excitement. At 0800, the men were formed into three groups and ordered to begin evacuating Presidio La Bahia through the sally port of the Presidio La Bahia.³⁵ The guard force for Captains Pedro Balderas and Antonio Ramirez, and the Adjutant, Colonel Agustin Alcerrica, commanded each of the columns, respectively.

The largest group, including the remnants of the Georgia Battalion and Duval's company, was marched toward the upper ford of the San Antonio River on the Bexar road (fig. 12). The New Orleans Greys, Mobile Greys, and others were marched along the Victoria road in the direction of the lower ford. Shackelford's Red Rovers and Westover's Regulars were marched southwestward along the San Patricio road. The guard, which was to serve also as a firing squad, included the Yucatan dismounted cavalry and pickets from the Durango and Tampico regiments.³⁶



Fig. 12. One of the Three Palm Sunday Massacre Sites. “Upon each leader's command, the guard fired upon the prisoners at close range. Nearly all were killed on the initial volley.” Photograph taken by the author with special permission from Ms. Laura Kelly, Goliad, Texas, 19 December 2001.

At previously designated locations along each of the roads, ranging from one-half to one kilometer, the three groups were halted. The guard on the right flank of the column of prisoners then countermarched and formed with the guard on the left. Upon each leader's command, the guard fired upon the prisoners at close range. Nearly all were killed on the initial volley. Those not killed were pursued and slaughtered by musket fire, bayonet, or lance.³⁷

From the two groups shot on the river roads, those not instantly killed fled to the woods along the stream, and twenty-four managed to escape. The third group, on the San Patricio road, was more distant from natural cover and only four are known to have

survived. Fannin and some sixty wounded (nonambulatory) Texians were executed within the confines of the Presidio La Bahia.

The wounded were placed in the corner of the yard upon which the church door fronts. A company of [Mexican] soldiers formed in front of us and loaded their pieces with ball cartridge. Then a file of men under a corporal took two of our number, marched them out toward the company, and after bandaging their eyes made them lie with their faces to the ground, after which, placing the muzzles close to their heads, shot them as they lay.³⁸

Colonel Fannin was the last victim of the massacre, and he met his fate like a soldier. He did not demonstrate resistance and displayed no desire to live after the execution of his men. He was escorted to the square of the Presidio by a guard, where he was seated on a bench and blindfolded. He pulled a gold watch out of his pocket and handed it to the officer assigned to execute him (fig. 13). He requested that the watch be delivered to his wife and that he not be shot in the head, but the breast. He additionally requested that his remains be given a Christian burial. None of the requests would be honored. Fannin bared his chest and braced himself to receive fire. The officer took the watch, and immediately ordered the guard to fire at his head, which was nearly torn off by the combined impact. Colonel Fannin fell dead and his body was dragged by its feet and thrown into a ravine near the fort.³⁹

The stripped bodies of the slain were collected and stacked in piles. Those who were massacred at the fort, Fannin included, were “chucked stark naked into carts, like so many dead hogs, carried out and dumped on top of the others.”⁴⁰ Brush was used for kindling and the bodies were set afire. “Nightly the prairie wolves gathered to feast on the half-roasted bodies, and kept up their howlings though all . . . their horrid banquet.”⁴¹

A man-by-man study of Fannin's command indicates that 342 were executed at Goliad on

27 March. A total of twenty-eight escaped the firing squads, and twenty more were spared as physicians, orderlies, interpreters, and mechanics.⁴² Many of the pardoned survivors attributed the intercession of an unknown priest and Francita Alavez, known as the “Angel of Goliad,” as responsible for their ultimate survival.⁴³

Early the following June, the Texian Army under the command of General Thomas Rusk, arrived at Goliad. The remains of the massacre victims were collected and interred in a mass grave located outside the walls of the Presidio La Bahia. On 3 June 1836, Fannin and the men of Goliad were given a funeral with full military honors.⁴⁴

Despite the tragic outcome of this stand for independence and the blundering decisions that sealed the participants' fates, in death they achieved martyrdom and immortality. “Remember Goliad! Remember the Alamo!”⁴⁵ became the rallying cry of Sam Houston's army at San Jacinto, where one decisive battle turned the tide of the Texas Revolution and ultimately led to the defeat of the Mexican Army.



Fig. 13. The Dallas Historical Society's display of the watch claimed to belong to Colonel James Walker Fannin Jr., who requested it be delivered to his wife. Photograph source: Dallas Historical Society, P.O. Box 150038, Dallas, Texas 75315-0038.

¹Dettman, 28.

²Hardin, 166.

³Handbook of Texas, *Goliad Campaign of 1836* (Austin, Texas: Texas State Library, 1995), 211-213.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 167-170.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Brown, *Hesitant Martyr in the Texas Revolution*, 192-193.

⁸Ibid, 192-195.

⁹Ibid, 202-205.

¹⁰Jackie L. Pruet, *Goliad Massacre: A Tragedy of the Texas Revolution* (Austin, Texas: Akin Press, 1985), 82.

- ¹¹Ibid.
- ¹²Brown, *Hesitant Martyr in the Texas Revolution*, 202-205.
- ¹³Hardin, 171.
- ¹⁴Abel Morgan, "Abel Morgan and His Account of the Battle of Goliad," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 100, no. 2 (1996): 213-214.
- ¹⁵Ibid.
- ¹⁶Craig H. Roell, *Remember Goliad!* (Austin, Texas: Texas State Historical Association, 1994), 63.
- ¹⁷Kathryn Stoner O'Connor, *Presidio La Bahia 1721 - 1846* (Austin, Texas: Wexford Publishing, reprint 2001), 125.
- ¹⁸John C. Duval, "John C. Duval's Account of the Goliad Massacre," *Sons of DeWitt Colony Texas*; available from <http://www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/goliadduval.htm>; Internet; accessed on 3 December 2001.
- ¹⁹Jose C. Urrea, *General Jose Urrea's Diary February - March 1836*, available from <http://www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/goliadurrea.htm>; Internet; accessed on 6 September 2001. After the fall of the Alamo, Santa Anna ordered 500 Mexican troops, commanded by Colonel Juan Morales, to reinforce Goliad. Morales' veteran troops joined Urrea's forces on March 20, 1836.
- ²⁰John C. Duval, *John C. Duval's Account of the Goliad Massacre*, <http://www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/goliadduval.htm>, accessed 3 December 2001.
- ²¹O'Connor, 125-127.
- ²²Castaneda, 89-90.
- ²³Ibid., 91-92.
- ²⁴Scott, 203-204.
- ²⁵Herman Ehrenberg, "Battle of Coleto Creek and Massacre at Goliad by Herman Ehrenberg," available from <http://www.tamu.edu/cbn/dewitt/goliadehrenberg.htm>; Internet; accessed 6 September 2001.
- ²⁶Brown, *Hesitant Martyr in the Texas Revolution*, 212-215.
- ²⁷Ibid.
- ²⁸McKeehan, 14.

²⁹Wallace L. McKeehan, "Massacre at Goliad-Diverse Accounts," *Sons of Dewitt Colony Texas*, 1997, p. 1; <http://www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/goliaddiverse/htm>; accessed on 6 September 2002.

³⁰Ibid. It should be noted that ten members of the captured remnants of the Georgia Battalion escaped while enroute to Goliad.

³¹Brown, *Hesitant Martyr in the Texas Revolution*, 215-217.

³²General Antonio de Santa Anna, *Santa Anna to Lieutenant Colonel Portilla, Official Communications La Bahia 1836*, <http://www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/goliadofficial.htm>, accessed 5 December 2001.

³³Handbook of Texas Online, "Goliad Massacre," *The Texas State Historical Association*, 1997, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/GG/qeg2.html>, accessed 6 September 2001, 4.

³⁴General Antonio de Santa Anna, "Santa Anna to Lieutenant Colonel Portilla, Official Communications La Bahia 1836," <http://www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/goliadofficial.htm>, accessed 5 December 2001.

³⁵Brown, *Hesitant Martyr in the Texas Revolution*, 218-220.

³⁶Handbook of Texas Online, "Goliad Massacre," *The Texas State Historical Association*, 1997, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/GG/qeg2.html>, accessed 6 September 2001, 4.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Andrew A. Boyle, "Reminiscences of the Texas Revolution", *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 13, April 1910, 285-291.

³⁹John C. Duval, *Battle of Coleto, Capitulation and Survival of the Goliad Massacre as told by John C. Duval*, [Http://www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/goliadduval.htm](http://www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/goliadduval.htm), accessed 3 December 2001, 12.

⁴⁰Wallace L. McKeehan, "Massacre at Goliad- Diverse Accounts," *Sons of Dewitt Colony Texas*, 1997, <http://www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/goliaddiverse.htm>, accessed 6 September 2001, 4.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Handbook of Texas Online, "Goliad Massacre," *The Texas State Historical Association*, 1997, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/GG/qeg2.html>, accessed 6 September 2001, 5.

⁴³O'Conner, 99.

⁴⁴Dettman, 33.

⁴⁵Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES APPLIED

On Character and Competence

Although the Battle of Coleto Creek is considered meaningful as a prologue to the massacre, it does have separate significance. The sequence of events underscores the tragedy of Fannin's inability to make timely decisions crucial for any degree of success. This handicap was exacerbated by his disrespect for the capabilities of his enemy and reluctance, common in the Texian Army, to coordinate campaigns. The thesis shall examine the underpinnings of his character, decision-making ability, and leader attributes. Lastly, the thesis will consider the actions of other leaders involved in the campaign.

“People come to the Army with a character formed by their background, religious or philosophical beliefs, education, and experience.”¹ The “be” of *be, know, do* highlighted in Field Manual 22-100 describes character as a leader's inner strength and the quality that gives one the courage to do what is right regardless of the consequences. Character helps a leader know what is right and links knowledge to action.² So what can be said about character development and its impact on James Walker Fannin Jr.?

Fannin was born an illegitimate child during a time in history when it was considered shameful and brought dishonor to every member of the family. His father's absence during critical periods in his childhood may have proven detrimental to his character development and self-confidence. Fatherly words of encouragement and an occasional “pat on the back” go a long way in building a boy's esteem. Perhaps a perpetual need to prove himself in the eyes of others and the desire to appear “good

enough” or *legitimate* shaped Fannin's character early on in life and transcended into adulthood.

Arguably, it was Fannin's intention to mislead revolutionary Texians into believing he was a capable leader, trained and skilled in every aspect of warfare. Regardless, if this was a gross overestimation on the part of overzealous Texians or an ambitious maneuver for power on his part, Fannin continued living a lie--a lie that eventually cost the lives of 342 men. There is no documentation that proves he ever denied the acclaim, respect, and credibility afforded him because of his *perceived* stature, which may have somehow made up for his illegitimacy and the afflictions of his past. Character development is a complex lifelong process that is essential to living a consistent and moral life.³

At the age of fourteen, Fannin entered the United States Military Academy on the coattails of his natural father's distinguished military career. Perhaps winning his father's favor as an Army officer was his motivation for pursuing a West Point education. Even at this juncture, it appears he undertook much more than he was capable of. The institution's regimented system, stringent disciplinary policies, and academic standards proved too much for him.

Finishing near the bottom of his class, he was forced to repeat his freshman year. It should be noted that only general studies were instructed during the first year of matriculation at West Point. Military tactics, history of warfare, and engineering were not introduced as part of the cadet curriculum until the second year, thus he acquired no formal military training or organizational skills during his abbreviated enrollment. The “hollow square” formation Fannin employed at Coleto Creek was a tactic used by the

Napoleonic armies of Europe. Where and how he learned this technique is unknown. Perhaps he adopted a personal professional reading program as a hobby or used what he read to increase his knowledge base and exploit it as a medium to delude his supporters and detractors. His education, or lack thereof, proved critical in later years and certainly etched his character and leader development.

Fannin's illegitimate birth dogged him throughout his brief tenure at the academy. Records indicate that he was involved in physical confrontations due to harassment by his peers, which exploited his illegitimacy. Many speculate that these altercations were the actual reason for his withdrawal. This character-defining experience, occurring so early in life, produced the inklings of self-doubt and certainly reinforced his feelings of unworthiness, which later had a profound effect on his decision-making capacity and conceptual foresight.

Following his resignation or, more likely, expulsion from the military academy, Fannin returned to Georgia and later took up the practice of slave trading. His peregrinations eventually brought him to the Mexican territory of Texas where slavery had been banned by the provincial government. His participation in the illegal *industry* proved indicative of his character. He clearly demonstrated a lack of concern for the rules of the nation (Mexico) or the humanitarian principles of mankind. It must be assumed that his illegal trade practices forged a pattern of deceit, prevarication, and chicanery necessary for its furtive survival. His notorious reputation as an indebted gambler further validates the belief that his character and moral stance were suspect.

Having failed in business and personal affairs, Fannin somehow found his niche as a lead agent for the Texas Revolution. His brief service with the Brazos Guards

springboarded his career as a soldier and fulfilled his dream of becoming an Army officer. He organized a force that decisively engaged and defeated Mexican occupation troops and earned the confidence and respect of his fellow revolutionaries. Call it blind luck or simply being in the “right place at the right time,” his actions impressed many Texian insiders, which included the likes of Stephen F. Austin. Once the masses voted favorably to raise an army to defend their cause, who was more qualified to lead them than James W. Fannin Jr.? The fact that he had only a marginal degree of experience and military education did not matter to the warmongering Texans who were anxious for a fight. As far as they were concerned, an eighteen-month stint at West Point coupled with limited combat experience equated to General Dwight D. Eisenhower! Fannin was unanimously elected to the position of Commander of Goliad and subsequently appointed to the rank of Colonel. He was considered the most credentialed candidate for a command in the entire territory and, arguably, more qualified than Sam Houston and William Travis.

Jack Shackleford, a physician by trade, and without prior military association possessed the means and motivation to organize, train, and equip the Alabama Red Rovers. His lack of military exposure was never a discriminator to this movement. The will and desire to support and defend the Texian cause was enough and met the criteria for leader, “one each.” Bonafide military education, full commissions, and leader development defined by today's standards were never issues to Texans. If Fannin or Travis proved successful at Goliad and the Alamo against such overwhelming odds, the lucrative potential for state office and future wealth, power, and influence made all of the risks of commanding Texian forces against a superior enemy acceptable to both men.

Certainly personal advancement and not simply, the love of Texas, was a motivating factor in their quests for fame.

On Duty and Loyalty

Duty is succinctly defined as fulfilling obligations. It entails conduct based on moral or legal obligation. The essence of duty is acting in the absence of orders or direction from others and is based on an inner sense of what is morally and professionally right. A leader's duty is to take the initiative, despite unfamiliar circumstances, determine what the mission requires, and make decisions accordingly.⁴ Modern army leaders inculcate this *core value* into our formations and attempt in earnest to live up to its creed. The Goliad Campaign of 1836 is marred with poignant examples opposing this value and, tragically, depicts only a few models epitomizing it.

In the minds of many Texas Revolution scholars familiar with the campaign, Fannin neglected his duty to come to the aid of Colonel Travis and is viewed as a hapless scapegoat for the annihilation of the Alamo. Travis solicited his aid on more than one occasion in the weeks before the Alamo fell to Santa Anna. The sense of duty so moved Fannin that at one point he haphazardly deployed his forces in an attempt to join forces as requested. An unsuccessful road march due to poor planning and execution negated any rescue attempt and ended the expedition less than three miles from its origin. But was it really Fannin's duty and obligation to help defend the Alamo or should he have remained at Goliad and prepared his defenses for an imminent Mexican attack?

Goliad was a more viable fortification and unquestionably more defensible than the Alamo. If a stand for Texas was to be made, why not Goliad instead of the Alamo? It certainly possessed more strategic importance based on its proximity to the Port of

Copano. Fannin never suggested to Travis that he move his command and join forces, nor is there record of definitive guidance from Governor Robinson or General Sam Houston, Commander-in-Chief. The leaders did what they each considered appropriate action for their respective areas of operations and did not consider mutual support or a coordinated effort. As illustrated previously, it is likely that Fannin and his men would have been killed attempting to reinforce the Alamo. Santa Anna's divisional forces had occupied the areas surrounding the Alamo and the city of Bexar since mid-February, 1836 and denied all major points of penetration.

General Urrea, by sharp contrast, showed skill in his intelligence collection efforts. He kept attuned to Fannin's every move by keeping the Texians inside Fort Defiance an extra day, pursuing and catching them by taking advantage of every opportunity, and isolating Ward's men near Victoria while decisively engaging Fannin's command at Coleto Creek. A consummate soldier, Urrea's performance and demonstrated leader attributes in during the Goliad Campaign of 1836 later catapulted him to national prominence.

Ultimately the commander is responsible for the success or failure of a unit in combat; however, Fannin is not solely to blame for the fiasco which took place during the evacuation of *Presidio La Bahia*. Direct level leaders, like organizational leaders, share a host of responsibilities related to day-to-day operations, including the preparation for a major movement. Fannin's subordinate leaders had a *duty* to ensure all necessary functions were conducted to facilitate the unit's evacuation. The fact that Fannin gave the warning order to move and then stalled for twenty-four hours does not excuse them from neglecting to feed and water the draft animals, execute precombat inspections and other

troop leading procedures. This failure to do what was right in the absence of the commander and his specific guidance contributed to the unforgivable delay and ultimate demise of the command.

Lieutenant Colonel Albert C. Horton failed to come to the aid of Fannin and his men when they went to ground at Coleto Creek. He chose not to engage the Mexican Advance Guard with his (recently attached) cavalry for fear of annihilation against superior numbers. His loyalty was to his men and himself and not Fannin, whom he had only recently been acquainted. His refusal to assist and the perception of cowardice would haunt him the rest of his life, for it is believed he committed suicide some years later. Goliad's survivors certainly felt it was his *duty* and obligation to aid the beleaguered formation.

Bearing true faith and allegiance to the nation, the unit, and fellow soldiers is loyalty.⁵ Fannin's duty and loyalty was questioned when he did not follow General Houston's directive to evacuate Goliad and join his forces in Victoria. Records indicate a four-day delay from the time of notification to execution. If the order had been executed within twenty-four hours, Urrea's troops would not have closed with Fannin and his men. The main body of the Mexican 3rd Division would not depart Refugio for another four days. What can be said about Fannin's duty and loyalty to Ward and King? Several survivors attribute the delay in evacuating Goliad to the unknown fate of the task force commanders sent to rescue Texians in Refugio. Fannin, in this instance, refused to leave his men behind and was prepared to provide assistance until their fate was confirmed.

Yes, he had an obligation to immediately follow his higher headquarters orders, but so too his men. "Leaders who are loyal to their subordinates never let them be

misused.”⁶ Fannin chose to wait for Ward and King, in addition to the majority of unit's draft animals, and *selectively* adhered to the Commander in Chief's directive. A more dynamic leader might have employed a rear detachment to facilitate the units' return while the main body evacuated or forwarded a situation report to inform higher of the current status. Despite this tactical error, Fannin exhibited his duty and loyalty to his men and not his higher command--a choice he made with clear conscience and steadfast resolve.

He demonstrated this same fierce loyalty again at Coleto Creek when he refused to allow his force to desert the wounded. He disregarded the open protests and resentment from internal organizations, such as the New Orleans Greys, who threatened to desert under the cover of darkness. Fannin somehow managed to influence his men to do what he felt was right--protect the wounded. This action was his single most defining moment as a leader. On this afternoon, there were no allegations of indecision or affronts to Fannin's personal integrity. On this day the Texians united and followed his commands. Even his harshest critics later praised his courage.

We would be remiss in not addressing the Mexican forces on the issue of duty and loyalty. Colonel Juan Portilla was faced with not only the issue of following two directives--one from his senior rater and one from his rater, but he struggled with an ethical dilemma as well. General Urrea specifically instructed him to spare the lives of the prisoners at Goliad until he returned from negotiating their freedom with General Santa Anna. During Urrea's brief absence, Portilla received official word from Santa Anna to immediately execute the men and burn their corpses. Portilla knew that this was

an act Urrea, a model soldier, deplored vehemently as did he. Urrea later wrote, I have made war like a soldier. My pride is founded on my never having

soiled victory with murder, and my having been always adjudged humane and just, as I am in fact. If during a the last campaign, one in which we were not fighting against a recognized nation, I was forced by law and by the strict orders of the supreme government to apply to the delinquents a penalty which though severe was legal and from whose application I could not excuse myself.⁷

Portilla spent the longest night of his life wrestling with his decision. The Mexican Congresses decree of 1835, which directed that “all foreigners taken in arms” against the government should be shot, was clear in its definition of what constituted criminal acts and piracy. The Texians were clearly violators of its contents.

All the existing laws, whose strict observance the government had just recommended, marked them as pirates and outlaws. The nations of the world would never have forgiven Mexico had it accorded them rights, privileges, and considerations which the common law of peoples accords only to constituted nations. The prisoners of Goliad were condemned by law.⁸

Portilla also had the duty to follow the last order from his superior officer, who happened to be the highest Mexican military or civil authority--there was no Inspector General or senior ranking officer to forward an appeal. If he followed Urrea's guidance and chose to spare the prisoner's lives, what were the consequences? Punishment by death most assuredly. He probably considered Urrea's position, which had been unsuccessful in influencing Santa Anna previously. Would his leader defend his actions at all costs and demonstrate loyalty and duty to him (Portilla)? And what about his duty and loyalty to himself and his personal values and ethical reasoning? Portilla knew it was inhumane to massacre defenseless, unarmed human beings in cold blood, yet he knew of his own fate if he stood by his convictions.

Santa Anna would find a blind and willing servant in Portilla, who ultimately chose to follow his despicable orders and disregard his own moral insight and ethical reasoning and assessment. An observer, Lieutenant José Enrique De La Peña, later criticized Portilla's actions: "Obedience should never be absolutely blind, for no superior officer can require or authorize a hundred men to violate natural law, and no one should obey orders obviously in violation of this sacred law."⁹

The impact of the Goliad massacre was tremendous. When the Goliad prisoners were seized, Texas had no other army in the field and the newly constituted interim government was incapable of immediately forming one. The Texas cause was dependent on the material aid and sympathy of the United States. Had Fannin's men been dumped on the wharves at New Orleans penniless, humiliated, and defeated by an "inferior enemy," Texas prestige in the United States would most likely have deteriorated, along with its resources. But Portilla's volleys at Goliad, coupled with the fall of the Alamo, branded Santa Anna and the Mexican people with a reputation for cruelty and aroused the fury of Texians and United States citizens abroad. The example the men of Goliad left was of priceless value, and constituted a heroic legacy. The passion and resolve to avenge their countrymen urged thousands to join the banner of the lone star.

¹Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual 22-100, *Army Leadership*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 31 August 1999), 2-22.

²Ibid., 1-6.

³Ibid., 2-23.

⁴Ibid., 2-4.

⁵Ibid., 2-3, 4.

⁶Ibid., 2-4.

⁷Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texan Revolution*, 63.

⁸Ibid., 16-20.

⁹Sons of DeWitt Colony Texas, *Massacre at Goliad- Mexican Centralista Descriptions*; available from <http://www.tamu.edu/cbn/dewitt/goliadmex2.htm>; Internet; accessed on 5 December 2001.

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